GREGORY OF NYSSA'S DOCTRINE ON KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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GREGORY OF NYSSA'S DOCTRINE ON KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The concern of this thesis is perennial for reflective man: what, if anything, can we know of God, and how can we know it? The difficulty arises in the awareness that God is the Other, the transcendent, ultimate Mystery, and that consequently, if there is to be any knowledge of Him at all, it must be acquired through different processes and by different means than is knowledge of things familiar to human experience. To the serious man the problem is pressing, for it involves the ultimate meaning of his and of all life. It also involves, at least indirectly, the entire problematic of the relation of understanding to faith and of philosophy to theology when the question is raised within the context of divine revelation.

The concern with God and with knowing Him is also eminently actual, for a variety of reasons. The confused state of the contemporary world, exulting in an awesome growth of its powers and buffeted by terrifying forces, prompts many men to ask ultimate questions with new urgency. Discoveries through the last century of the psychological importance of religious manifestations and activities, and the sociological awareness of the religious origins and aspects of practically every branch of human culture, have given the question of God new relevance. The temper of thought of the entire modern period has brought epistemological questions forward so that any query of the form

"How do we know . . . ?" is interesting, while the contemporary movements of linguistic analysis, phenomenology, existentialism, and personalism have all given new directions and new prominence to philosophical questions concerned with God and with the possibility and means of knowing Him.

Despite its transcendence of historical epochs and its universal character, the concern with knowledge of God is not abstract; in fact, it is so pre-eminently personal that to attempt to treat it in an attitude of "detached, scientific objectivity" could be close to sacrilege. The attitude of the individual man who confronts and grapples with it must be concern, not curiosity--what Plato calls "seriousness" (σπουδαιότης). Consequently it is deeply enmeshed in history, in a twofold sense. For one thing, in the ways men have actually answered it and acted on the answers, the problem is of no little importance in the whole of human history. But also, in a more restricted sense, it has a history of its own with a remarkable continuity, at least in the western world. Over the centuries of speculation and of prayer it has been shaped and modified, has grown and been in many ways illuminated; it has occupied the attention and directed the efforts of many of the greatest thinkers, always the same mystery and yet different and new in every age.

Very simply, then, the conviction on which this paper is based is that the problem, how God can be known, is of extreme importance for philosophy, for theology, and for the whole of human life, and that the only valid way to approach that problem is through its history. Our attention will be focused, then, on a part of that history: the way one man treated the question at a crucial juncture of Christian experience.

Why Saint Gregory of Nyssa? Reasons abound. He is "the most profound Greek philosopher of the Christian era, an incomparable poet and mystic";[1] he is a brilliant and original thinker, occasionally tedious, but rarely arid and frequently exciting.[2] Despite his great stature as both philosopher and theologian he has been much ignored in the past, and only at the present time is restitution beginning to be made for the neglect.[3] His mentality, as will be seen in the course of the discussion, has great appeal for our contemporary minds from many points of view.[4]

But these are either general or subsidiary reasons. The primary one is that the question of knowing God is completely central to

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[1] Hans Urs von Balthasar, Présence et pensée. Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse (Paris: Beauchesne, 1942), p. xiii.

[2] For a brief consideration of his style, see Walther Völker, Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1955), pp. 6-7; for a more extended discussion, Louis Méridier, L'influence de la seconde sophistique sur l'oeuvre de Grégoire de Nysse (Rennes, 1906). Quasten gives expression to the general point of view, that "as a speculative theologian and mystic he is certainly the most gifted of the three great Cappadocians" (Johannes Quasten, Patrology, III [Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1960], 254); cf. Ernest V. McClear, "The Fall of Man and Original Sin in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa," Theological Studies, IX (1948), 177.

[3] Jérome Gaith, for instance, points out that after long neglect there are now many studies of Gregory appearing, but that they are for the most part more concerned with his sources than with his originality. La conception de la liberté chez Grégoire de Nysse (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1953), p. 7.

[4] For a good introduction to Gregory's mentality, see Völker, Gregor . . . , pp. 1-6. As an indication of its modernity, consider his proposition that each of us is in a sense his own father, since we beget ourselves spiritually as what we want to be: De vita Moysis, MG 1. 328B; cf. Oratio catechetica, MG 2. 97C-100A. (For a discussion of Gregory's works and an explanation of the way they are referred to in the present paper, see Chap. II infra, p. 32, note 4.)

his thought and the occasion of his most striking personal doctrines. As one of his contemporary students expresses it: "The question which most deeply captivated his penetrating curiosity, and which is connected with his mystical preoccupations as well, is that of the knowledge man has of God: of its possibility and its necessity, its nature, its origin, and its development."[1] To examine this theme in Gregory is to penetrate to the roots of his thought, a source which is an ideal starting-point for study of all its other aspects. As the remainder of this paper will make clear, one could hardly err more widely than does Rudolph Otto when he says, in his highly influential The Idea of the Holy, about concern with the incomprehensibility of God: "What stirs Chrysostom passionately as a matter of the first moment is indeed only of secondary importance in Gregory, incidental to his dogmatic inquiries."[2]

Some justification may be required for proposing this as a thesis in philosophy since the object of our attention is primarily a theologian and the question itself is of theological interest. It is, of course, impossible and anachronistic to expect a clear distinction between philosophy and theology in the Fathers of the Church; Gregory, for instance, often uses the word "philosophy" to mean precisely what a contemporary writer normally means when he employs "theology" in its

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[1] David Amand, Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'université, 1945), p. 407.

[2] Rudoph Otto, The Idea of the Holy. An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational, trans. John W. Harvey (2d Eng. ed., "Galaxy Books," New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 185.

proper sense.[1] Indeed, he shows what to most post-Thomist minds must seem incredible confusion: he mingles Scriptural authority with rational argument in apparent abandon and makes no clear distinction between the natural and supernatural in man; in fact, "nature" implies for him a reference to man's original state, and is therefore necessarily in the order of grace.[2]

Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish, at least in part, between the theological and the strictly rational elements in his writings. Diekamp indicates the situation:

> St. Gregory's preference for philosophical speculation is evidenced by the fact that he also tries to give all theological questions a rational foundation and treatment. Actually, the speculative treatment of theology has already reached in him a relatively high degree of perfection. He almost always joins to a proof from authority a proof ἐκ τῶν κοινῶν ἐννοιῶν [from common notions] or ἐκ τῆς τῶν εἰκότων λογισμῶν ἀκολουθίας [from the implications of plausible arguments] unless, as in the Great Catechesis and some of the minor works, he even gives almost exclusive value to the latter.[3]

The problem of knowledge of God, in particular, is a philosoph-

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[1] Thus when discussing the spiritual life in the De vita Moysis (MG 1. 425A), he calls it "the true (τὴν ἀληθῆ) philosophy"; consistently with this, when referring to pagan philosophy he usually calls it ἡ ἔξω φιλοσοφία or παίδευσις (e.g. ibid., 329B, 337B [twice], 336D). Cf. Werner Jaeger, Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), p. 138: "Thus whereas St. Thomas later keeps philosophy and theology apart, Gregory takes the Platonic metaphysics into the very structure of his theology, thereby making it a kind of philosophy of the Neoplatonic type that is itself theology. . . . in the Vita Moysis . . . he had incorporated this ontology into the theory of the ascetic life."

[2] See McClear, "The Fall . . . ," p. 178. Gaith goes a little too far in saying that Gregory "considère la surnature comme partie intégrante et essentielle de la nature réelle" (La conception . . . , p. 74; my emphasis).

[3] Friedrich Diekamp, Die Gotteslehre des heiliges Gregor von Nyssa. Ein Beitrag zur Dogmengeschichte der patristischen Zeit, p. 18 (Münster: Aschendorf, 1896); so Amand, Fatalisme . . . , p. 410.

ical problem in the strictest sense of the word: it is the question of the proportion, or rather disproportion, between the nature (and consequently the intelligibility) of God and a finite intellect. Gregory never distinguishes between the natural and supernatural powers of the latter, although at different times he clearly refers to each; nor need he, for the reception of the supernatural illumination even of the beatific vision must have some ground in nature. It is the limitation of this natural ground, its finitude under any conceivable condition of nature or of grace, that renders full comprehension of God's nature impossible. Despite the support he adduces from revealed Scripture, it will be seen that Gregory's treatment of the problem is often, though not always, based on rational considerations. With this it is necessary to be content, since the only alternative is the evident absurdity of rejecting the Fathers of the Church en masse from the history of philosophy on the grounds that they have sullied its purity by introducing revealed truth into their discussion of philosophical questions.

This faute de mieux attitude is, however, unnecessary if it is possible to consider Gregory's conception of philosophy as a valid one: it does have a long and worthy tradition. For the Fathers in general, "philosophy" does not mean "cognitio rerum per causas ultimas naturaliter cognitas"; it means the earnest desire for and zealous pursuit of wisdom. This is its Platonic meaning: "love of wisdom" in a very real sense, connoting a vital personal and social seriousness which cannot be purely speculative. The meaning of the term "wisdom" remains the same, although what is concretely intended by it, of course, does not: whatever the latter be for Plato, for St. Gregory it is and must be the

triune God revealed in and by Jesus Christ. The wisdom loved is this Person, "Christ, God's power and God's wisdom," as St. Paul has emphatically informed him (I Cor. 1:24). The totality of being and the existential situation of man include, and for all time have included and will continue to include, the reality of grace, its presence or privation, and the entire Heilsgeschichte. Therefore Gregory's philosophy of man is concerned with the actual rather than with the theoretically possible, with man in the concrete rather than with abstract human nature. If this has the disadvantage of leaving no clearly differentiating borderline between the spheres of philosophy and theology, that may be counterbalanced by the universal interest and vital importance that philosophy so conceived undoubtedly has, psychologically adapted as it is to man and not merely to his speculative mind.

Gregory's Tradition

In the light of these considerations, a reference to the tradition and sources from which Gregory draws is appropriate. Although they are of great importance for a full understanding of his thought, a complete examination of them here is impossible, since it would lengthen this study beyond all reasonable limits. The approach taken here is historical to the extent that it is devoted to one outstanding figure in the history of the problem, but it must be content to indicate the derivation of his ideas. This necessity can be, in addition, a benefit if its effect is to focus sharper attention on Gregory's own thinking. Von Balthasar expresses the situation with his usual vigor: "The gaze backward toward the sources and elements can never take the place of the look forward that strains to grasp the synthesis effected,

the irreducible novelty. Although the fruit is contained in the roots, it is always something new and unexpected."[1] This will, indeed, be verified.

There is hardly need to stress that the fundamental influence on Gregory's thought is "the faith of Christians." The next chapter will give some idea of the degree to which his life was devoted to the Church and her concerns, and many of the quotations in the following pages will mark again and again his familiarity with and constant use of Scripture. Although the concern here will not be with his strictly theological interests and doctrines, they will nevertheless come forward with sufficient frequency to manifest his basic orientation. That is, very simply, the establishment of the principles that underlie a genuinely Christian life.

With regard to his more philosophical sources, there is again little need to point to the dominance of Plato: that is even a priori probable. For practically every one of the Fathers of the Church, Plato was not only the greatest of the ancient philosophers but, more, the ideal representative of all the pagan wisdom--no matter whether they considered that wisdom as a treasure bequeathed to the sons of God or as a work of the devil to be spurned. He therefore typifies the quandary confronting the early Christian thinkers with regard to pagan culture in general and its philosophical achievements in particular: to christen or to damn.

Despite that dispute, the Fathers' familiarity with and reli-

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[1] Présence . . . , p. xv.

ance on Plato is everywhere evident.[1] Gregory, in fact, evokes him constantly and variously, although indirectly: Cherniss, in spite of the extreme tendency of his principal conclusions, correctly points out that his references to Plato by name are extremely few and not very complimentary.[2] But the Christian Bishop does pay him the humble compliment of imitation: in theme, setting, and many details his De anima et resurrectione is modeled on the Phaedo, portraying his revered sister, Macrina, on her deathbed instructing him, a very inept Cebes-Simmias, in her final conversation about the Christian doctrine concerning the soul, death, and the life to come.

In addition, his writings are full, from first to last, of Platonic vocabulary, Platonic images, Platonic themes and concepts. Here again one of Cherniss' more solid conclusions is apposite:

> The use of phrases and figures remembered from Plato is common with Gregory. That these little quotations occur in non-philosophical passages establishes a basis for belief that he knew Plato accurately enough to quote him or imitate him without recourse to the writings of Plato himself or to handbooks.[3]
>
> . . . it is evident from our previous investigation that Gregory knew Plato at first hand and knew him exceedingly well. I cannot lay too much stress upon the characteristic which I have constantly illustrated, the freedom with which in various contexts he weaves together variously the different threads from the Platonic spindle. There seems to me no more conclusive proof possible of the contention that he was so well acquainted with the Platonic writings as to be able to refer to them from memory. The depth of this familiarity I hold to have been no less than its extensiveness.[4]

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[1] See especially for this René Arnou, "Le platonisme des Pères," Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, XII (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1935), 2258-2392.

[2] Harold F. Cherniss, The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa ("University of California Publications in Classical Philology," Volume XI, 1; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930), pp. 7-9 and notes 24-27, 30, 31, p. 66.

[3] Ibid., p. 67, note 40. [4] Ibid., pp. 60-61.

Not only are there evidences of familiarity with the Athenian philosopher, but they are called into play most frequently, perhaps, precisely in dealing with the problem of knowledge of God. It is too often ignored that what philosophy fundamentally means for Plato is concern for the possession, through knowledge, of man's ultimate and beatifying end, the extension of the ancient Pythagorean aim of purifying body and soul for final "contemplation of the divine"; this remains true whether or not Plato ever or often refers to that end as "God" and in spite of the more abstract, esoteric, and terrestrial concerns of the later dialogues.[1] From this point of view, then, he constitutes a major element of the history of the problem and the question of continuity between him and the Bishop of Nyssa rises almost automatically.

Further and finally, the question of the relationship between the Athenian and the Cappadocian is cogent since it has been treated, extensively and variously, by most of the recent writers who have contributed to the renewal of interest in Gregory. The concrete situation can be presented by a survey of some of the proposed solutions.

One extreme is represented by Cherniss. As heir of the liberal Protestant trend of the nineteenth century, he believes that the Fathers, with Gregory of Nyssa in the forefront, really succeeded in

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[1] I realize that this would by no means be universally conceded: there are those who consider such preoccupations in Plato as peripheral and inessential to the roots of his thought. But that question can be waived here; it is at any rate indisputable--and sufficient for the present argument--that this is the trend in Plato's thought with which the Fathers generally and Gregory in particular are concerned.

substituting a Neoplatonic Hellenism for the original Christianity. So he speaks of the

> . . . philosophical importance of the translation of . . . Platonic doctrines bodily into Christian theology. True, there already existed in Scripture certain passages to which the pagan philosophy could be hooked and Gregory had been shown the way by Philo and by Origen, but he was the first Christian who successfully imported into orthodox dogma so much Platonism that one may say he invented the means of making Christianity an excuse for becoming a Platonist.[1]

> So that at the end it seems that, but for some few orthodox dogmas which he could not circumvent, Gregory has merely applied Christian names to Plato's doctrine and called it Christian theology.[2]

The most prominent exponent of the opposite interpretation of the relationship is Daniélou, who has probably written more on Gregory and various facets of his work than anyone now alive. With regard to the Father of the Church, he claims:

> . . . all the expressions borrowed from the vocabulary of ancient thought acquired a completely different meaning in him. . . . the study of all the texts has convinced us that there is no reason to inquire what were the Platonic elements of Gregory's thought, that we should rather accustom ourselves to see it as a purely Christian thought which has borrowed only its forms of expression from the philosophical language of the time when it was formulated. . . . The Platonic structure here, then, is accidental. Substantially the same thought could be expressed just as well by borrowing the categories of the buddhist technique; it would be none the less a Christian and not a buddhist mysticism.[3]

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[1] Cherniss, Platonism . . . , p. 48.

[2] Ibid., p. 62. Cherniss has little liking for Gregory's personality and does not hesitate to charge him with conscious duplicity: ". . . he desires that no one may be able to charge him, as he charges Eunomius, with being a pagan in disguise, even with knowing too much pagan philosophy, which in his day was enough to prove a theologian wrong, nay to prove him an heretic." Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Jean Daniélou, Platonisme et théologie mystique (2d ed. rev.; Paris: Aubier, 1954), pp. 8-9. The same passage contains the interesting observation: "On peut dire, en somme, que Grégoire a tout allégorisé, même la philosophie. Le langage platonicien, surtout celui des mythes, lui offre, en concurrence avec la Bible, un trésor d'expres-

Keenan practically paraphrases this statement, with approbation, and adduces Mersch as being of the same point of view.[1] Leys is fundamentally in agreement with this position, although he criticizes Daniélou for giving too little consideration to Platonism, especially in the Neoplatonists and Fathers other than Gregory, and does see some Platonic inspiration in Gregory's treatment of the image-theme.[2] Finally, the author of the section of the article "Contemplation" in the Dictionnaire de spiritualité which deals with Gregory's vocabulary insists:

> It would be a falsification of Gregory's thought to expound in their original sense the terms, theories, and images of Platonic philosophy which he has gathered together in his works, for they have taken on there an indisputably Christian meaning.[3]

Without denying, therefore, that Gregory was familiar with Plato, those who propose this interpretation claim that he so transformed whatever he received as to make of it something completely new. The quotation from Daniélou above is indicative of their tendency to limit what Gregory accepted from Plato to verbal expressions or images, excluding

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sions parlantes pour ses auditeurs et par lesquelles il décrit le mystère unique dont il parle, de la transformation de l'âme en Jésus-Christ."

[1]Sister M. E. Keenan, "De Professione Christiana and De Perfectione. A Study of the Ascetical Doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, No. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 206 and note 1.

[2]Roger Leys, L'image de Dieu chez saint Grégoire de Nysse (Bruxelles: L'édition universelle, 1951), p. 17. Gregory's doctrine of the image will be examined in detail in what follows, especially in Chapters IV and V infra.

[3]Col. 1775; the part of the article which includes the study of Gregory's terminology is attributed to J. Lemaître, R. Roques, and M. Viller.

conceptual structures and philosophical doctrines or insights. This tendency is much more comprehensible if seen as a reaction to the kind of extreme represented by Cherniss' interpretation.

And indeed it has its own extremes, which may be seen in Weiswurm's dissertation on Gregory's doctrine of knowledge, according to which "he was one of the earliest and, therefore, one of the most important exponents of that philosophical development which, in the time of Scholasticism, resulted in the ascendency of Aristotle over Plato."[1] He regards knowledge as a union between subject and object, "and there are indications that he regarded this union to be such that the subject becomes the object by acquiring the form of the latter and possessing it in an immaterial manner."[2] Whether, as this author claims, his concept of the nature of knowledge is "rather primitive and undeveloped" will appear in due course.

Better balanced is the estimate of Diekamp: while considering Gregory thoroughly Christian, he admits a strong Platonic influence on his doctrine concerning God's nature and knowledge of Him.[3] Jaeger's view is that the fundamental metaphysical concepts of Plato "form the core of Gregory's theology" once such errors as the doctrine of trans-

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[1] Alcuin Alois Weiswurm, The Nature of Human Knowledge according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa ("Catholic University of America Philosophical Studies," Vol. CXXXVI; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 67.

[3] Diekamp, Gotteslehre . . . , p. 33: "Er nennt Plato 'den Weisen unter den Heiden' und bekundet vor Allem dadurch seine Hochschätzung gegen ihm, dass er sich in vielen Punkten an ihn anschliesst. Die Darstellung der Lehre Gregors von der Erkenntnis Gottes und von dem Wesen der Gottheit wird diesen Anschluss vielfach bestätigen."

migration of souls have been purified away under the influence of Revelation. "If we look at it from this point of view, all of Gregory's thought and writing appears as a consistent effort to bring about this catharsis of Greek philosophy."[1] For von Balthasar, likewise, his thought

> . . . has been better able than any other to transpose interiorly the spiritual heritage of ancient Greece into the Christian mode. And this he accomplished in that profoundly Hellenic spirit for which religious experience can be translated, undestroyed, by conceptual expression, for which the crystal of thought catches fire within and becomes a mystical life. . . . Gregory's charm is the perfect harmony that reigns between the "system" and its religious realization, between the idea and the drama.[2]

This last view seems to me much the most accurate; the second, that of Daniélou and his followers, while justly emphasizing the essentially Christian dimension of all Gregory's thought and writing, apparently reacts too strongly against the extreme position represented by Cherniss. Although the controversy cannot be settled in the present study, sufficient material may be available for the reader familiar with Plato to draw a tentative conclusion. (The problem is, of course, further complicated by the question about how Plato himself is to be interpreted: quot Platonici, tot Platones!)

The emphasis accorded here to Plato's role is not meant to imply that he is the only, or even the greatest, influence on Gregory's thought in general, or on his doctrine concerning knowledge of God. The Bishop of Nyssa had read widely as well as deeply.[3] One of the

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[1] Jaeger, Two Rediscovered Works . . . , pp. 136-38.

[2] Von Balthasar, Présence . . . , p. xiv.

[3] C. E. Owen, "St. Gregory of Nyssa. Grammar, Vocabulary and Style," Journal of Theological Studies, XXVI (1925), 69-70: ". . . his close acquaintance with Greek literature which is obvious everywhere

characteristics most clearly revealed by the body of his work is a wide-eyed alertness and ranging curiosity; consequently he was open to abundant sources of influence, many of which are in fact discernible in his writings.

His dependence on the Bible, for instance, is not confined to the book itself: rather it is Scripture as read and preached and pondered and commented on, in the Church, by a tradition already in his own time centuries old. The foremost individual in this connection is Origen, with whom on numerous fundamental points Gregory allies himself, although feeling free to reject, and vigorously, some of the great Alexandrian's excesses. He is indebted, too, to Methodius of Olympus.[1] In approaching a Trinitarian question, he declares: "If our reasoning be found unequal to the problem, we must keep forever firm and unmoved the tradition we have received by succession from the Fathers."[2] His brother, Saint Basil the Great, was in charge of his early studies and until his death had a dominating effect on Gregory's formation and interests.

Reference to the Fathers suggests the possibility that Platonic influences on Gregory may have been indirect as well as direct; this is certainly the case. Gregory was familiar with Philo and his attempts

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(his invective, for instance, is full of reminiscences of Demosthenes and Aristophanes) is especially conspicuous in his use of words employed in particular associations by the great writers. . . . Plato and Demosthenes and Aristophanes are the writers he recalls, perhaps, most frequently . . ." This is followed by numerous examples of such references in Gregory's writings.

[1] Quasten, Patrology, III, 262.

[2] Quod non sint tres dii, MG 2. 117 (Jaeger edition, Volume III, Part I, p. 39, lines 1-3).

to wed Platonic philosophy with Old Testament exegesis, and in fact adopted many of his allegorical interpretations.[1] Origen was in many respects a Platonist, and Methodius had written a work on virginity which was, in form, an imitation of the Symposium. There are diverse Neoplatonic influences; it is now quite certain that Gregory has read Plotinus and that Basil knew him well.[2] But the importance of this source is still largely undetermined.[3]

There is an abundance of Stoic language in Gregory's writings, but by his time such terms were common property rather than that of a particular school.[4] Their pantheistic and materialistic doctrines, along with Epicurean atomism and hedonism, are emphatically rejected in the De anima et resurrectione. There is much controversy about the im-

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[1] Diekamp, Gotteslehre . . . , p. 35; cf. Daniélou's notes to his edition of Gregory's De vita Moysis ("Sources chrétiennes," I[bis]; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1955), passim.

[2] Daniélou, "Grégoire de Nysse et Plotin," Association Guillaume Budé. Actes du Congrès de Tours et de Poitiers (1953), 259-62, shows for instance that the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth chapters of Gregory's De virginitate are largely derived from Enneads I, 6 and VI, 9, adding that both had also been used by Basil, the former in his last work, the homilies on the hexaëmeron (which, however, was written some time after Gregory's work on virginity). Gaith, La conception . . . , pp. 21-22, indicates the verbal reproduction in the Contra Eunomium, MG 2. 609B (Jaeger ed., II, 45.27 - 46.3) of Ennead VI, 8, 13. Leys, L'image . . . , p. 46, note 4, adduces numerous examples of passages related to Plotinus.

For Basil's relationship to Plotinus, see Paul Henry, Les états du texte de Plotin, p. 167: "Il s'est familiarisé avec les Ennéades et s'en est inspiré à toutes les époques de sa carrière." (Cited by Leys, ibid.)

[3] See, for instance, Amand, Fatalisme . . . , p. 406, note 2: "Exposer systématiquement le mystique de Grégoire, en tenant compte de ses sources vivantes et littéraires, notamment des Ennéades plotiniennes, est une tâche immense et délicate qui n'a pas encore été entreprise."

[4] Ibid., p. 407.

portance for both Gregory and Basil of a (postulated) commentary on the Timaeus by Posidonius.[1] The best solution appears to be that he used Stoic sources on scientific questions but rejected their philosophical conclusions.[2] According to Quasten, "Certain Stoic elements appear in his ethical doctrine."[3] Finally, although von Balthasar professes to find his basic conception of knowledge Stoic ("grasp" rather than the Platonic "vision"), this claim is justly rejected by Leys.[4]

To attempt a relative evaluation of the importance of all these varied sources for even one aspect of Gregory's thought, although an important and fascinating task, would be impossible here. For the reasons outlined above, therefore, this study will be confined to the examination of Gregory's own doctrine on the problem of knowing God; only incidental references will be made to the thought of his predecessors.

This section may now be concluded with an outline of the manner in which the rest of the paper is to be developed. The next chapter will complete the introduction to the problem by giving some relevant

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[1] See Karl Gronau, Poseidonios und die judisch-christliche Genesisexegese (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914); Endre von Ivanka, "Die Autorschaft der Homilien Εἰς τὸ ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον (Poseidonios bei den Kappadokischen Kirchenvatern)," Byzantinische Zeitschrift, XXXVI (1936), 46-57, and idem, "Die Quellen von Ciceros De natura deorum II, 45-60 (Poseidonios bei Gregor von Nyssa)," Archivum Philologicum, LIX (1935), 10-21; and the "Appendix" to Leys, L'image . . . , pp. 130-32.

[2] Ernesto Corsini, "Nouvelles perspectives sur le problème des sources de l'Hexaéméron de Grégoire de Nysse," Studia Patristica. Papers Presented to the Second International Conference on Patristic Studies Held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1955, ed. Kurt Aland and F. L. Cross, ("Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur," Bd. 63; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), I, 101-02.

[3] Quasten, Patrology, III, 284.

[4] L'image . . . , p. 52, note 6; von Balthasar, Présence . . . , p. 64, note 1.

details with regard to Gregory's life, his historical situation and its effect on his life and thought, and the writings which are the primary sources of his teaching.

In the third chapter the ultimate difference between God and creatures will be treated from the viewpoint of the difficulties it presents for knowing God. The fourth chapter will discuss man's need to know God and the basis for such a possibility afforded by the image of God in man. The means by which God can be known will be the topic of the next, and the content of the resultant knowledge the subject of the sixth chapter. The seventh will confront the basic problem of the incomprehensibility of God and the consequent fact that language cannot express Him, examining at the same time the ontological ground of this apparent barrier to knowledge; in the chapter following it will be recognized that the source of the difficulty is at the same time the basis of the possibility of transcending without denying it.

CHAPTER II

GREGORY'S BACKGROUND AND WORK

His Life

Although little is known to us in detail about the life of Saint Gregory, once Bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia, there can be no doubt that he was, both by inheritance and by choice, essentially a son of the Church. He was born in 335 A.D. or shortly before,[1] of parents whose families were "distinguished for their wealth, their position and their holiness."[2] His grandmother, Saint Macrina the Elder, had been converted to the faith by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus,[3] and the family was thoroughly Christian: besides Gregory his brothers Basil and Peter were bishops, and all, along with their sister Macrina, are saints. He tells us that the family owned land in three provinces; this must have made it easier for Basil and his sister, foundress of a community of religious women who followed his rule, to establish their

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[1] Quasten, Patrology, III, 254, following the traditional view. Daniélou prefers an earlier date: in "Le mariage de Grégoire de Nysse et la chronologie de sa vie," Revue des études augustiniennes, II (1956), 71-78, he proposed 332; in the introduction to his edition of the De vita Moysis (1955), p. ii, and in Jean Daniélou and Herbert A. Musurillo, From Glory to Glory. Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 3, he moves the date back as far as 330.

[2] Keenan, "De Professione . . . ," p. 170.

[3] Basil, Epistles 204, 223 (MG XXXII, 752D-55A, 825C); the fact is important for the connection of Basil and Gregory with Origen, for the Wonder-worker was one of the latter's most enthusiastic and well instructed disciples.

religious settlements.[1]

Their father was a teacher of rhetoric at Neocaesarea and the children received a good education;[2] Daniélou concludes from the fact that Gregory, unlike Basil, was not sent abroad for his studies that he was destined for the Church.[3] In his early manhood Gregory of Nazianzus upbraids him for becoming a professor of rhetoric instead of receiving holy orders.[4] According to the traditional account he entered Basil's community on the Iris when he was about thirty;[5] Daniélou, disputing this, first claimed that it could not have been until late in his life and now insists that there is "no evidence that he ever led a monastic life."[6] There is some reason to believe that he was at one time married, though nothing certain is known of this.[7]

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[1] Vita Macrinae, MG 3. 959-1000. For a description of Cappadocia in ancient times, see Endre von Ivanka, Hellenisches und Christliches im Frühbyzantinischen Geistesleben (Vienna: Herder, 1948), pp. 28-42: it had been broken up into a number of small fiefs under the Hittites, subjected to strong Iranian influence by the Medes, and partially Hellenized under the domination of Mithridates.

[2] Vita Macrinae, MG 3. 981B.

[3] "Le mariage . . . ," 71-78; but cf. the quotation from Owen in note 3, p. 14 supra. Gregory relates, in a sermon "On the Forty Martyrs" (MG 3. 784D-85B), a vision he had in youth which led him to repentance and religious fervor.

[4] Ep. 11, MG XXXVII, 41B-44B, written about the year 365.

[5] See, e.g., Quasten, Patrology? III, 254. Basil had tried to draw him as early as 359: see MG XXXII, 276.

[6] "Le mariage . . . ," p. 76: this would have been the last ten years of his life; the quoted statement is in From Glory . . . , p. 3.

[7] See Gregory's De virginitate, chap. 3, MG 3. 325. Daniélou proposes, in "Le mariage . . . ," that Gregory's wife would have died about 385, inferring this from the consolation offered him by Gregory of Nazianzus (MG XXXVII, 321B-D); this involves him in the supposition that the latter's two epigrams on Theosebeia deal with Gregory (of

Basil's influence on him was deep and lasting. On his return from studies at Athens he appears to have instructed Gregory at Caesarea for about two years.[1] Gregory frequently refers to him as his father, his master, his teacher, even his only teacher;[2] in addition he constantly refers to his brother as "great" and as a "light of the Church."[3] It was at Basil's insistence that, in 371, he became a bishop; thereafter he was subject to frequent rebukes from his brother for being too easy with people and for his ineptitude in Church politics and financial affairs.[4] Basil was a powerful, driving personality and Gregory was not; nevertheless the latter appears never to have wavered in his admiration for and devotion to his brother, and from a certain point of view the whole of his life and writings can be seen as an attempt to further and consolidate Basil's work.[5]

Nyssa's)[1] sister, not his wife, who would have had the same name as his wife and been married to another Gregory. Daniélou claims that the marriage would have occurred between 359 and 365, and that a son was born sometime between 360 and 364 [sic] (this last on the basis of two obscure references in Gregory's letters: MG 3. 1048, 1053A; Jaeger ed., VIII, Part 1, 45,10 and 48,13).

But this involved hypothesis has encountered little scholarly welcome; see, for example, the rejection of Elmer O'Brien, "Current Theology: Ascetical and Mystical Theology, 1956-1957," Theological Studies, XIX (1958), 68.

[1] Daniélou, "Le mariage . . . ," 71-78.

[2] Apologia in hexaëmeron, MG 1. 61A-C; De hominis opificio, ibid., 125B; Contra Eunomium, MG 2. 273BC (Jaeger ed., I, 48,21-26); Ep. 13, MG 3. 1048-49 (Jaeger ed., VIII, Part 2, 45-46).

[3] Encomium in fratrem suum Basilium, MG 3. 796D; Contra Eunomium, MG 2. 913A-C (Jaeger ed., I, 229,9-28).

[4] Basil, Epistle 33, 58-60, 100, 215; MG XXXII, 317-20, 408-16, 505A, 792A.

[5] For an account of Gregory's personality see Völker, Gregor . . . , pp. 7-8.

If the youthful Bishop of Nyssa wrote little or nothing during the first seven or eight years of his episcopal career, it is probably because he was having difficulty enough holding his head above water. The practical inefficiency indicated in Basil's letters to him may well have furnished the pretext for the synod of Arian bishops, convened at Nyssa by the governor of Pontus in 376, which condemned and deposed him in his absence on charges of financial mismanagement.[1] It was not until the death of the Emperor Valens, in August of 378, that it was possible for him to return to his see; he describes in an exultant letter the reception tendered him by his flock.[2] About a year later, the council of Antioch sent him on a mission to the bishops of Arabia and Palestine; as he was returning from that journey, he happened to stop at Sebaste, where the ordinary had recently died, and despite his protestations was chosen as the successor. It took him a couple of months to escape back to his own diocese.[3]

In the next year Gregory undoubtedly reached the acme of his public career through his part in the second ecumenical council, the first of Constantinople; with the "other" Gregory, of Nazianzus, he brilliantly defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit. It is even possible, though unlikely, that he is the author of the creed which that Council promulgated; he did, at any rate, deliver the address which

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[1] P. Godet, "Grégoire de Nysse (Saint)," Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, VI (1925), col. 1847.

[2] Ep. 6, MG 3. 1033-36 (Jaeger ed., VIII, Part 2, 34-36).

[3] Godet, "Grégoire . . . ," col. 1847; cf. Diekamp, "Die Wahl Gregors von Nyssa zum Metropoliten von Sebaste im Jahre 380," Theologische Quartalschrift, XC (1908), 384-401.

initiated its sessions.[1] The Council appointed him one of three "defenders of the faith" in the region of Pontus and Cappadocia.[2] Thereafter he participated in a number of regional councils, and his stature is indicated by the fact that he was summoned to Constantinople in 385 to preach the funeral orations for the Princess Pulcheria and, shortly afterward, for her mother Flacilla, the Empress.

But his troubles were not over. After 386 his influence at court apparently waned as Chrysostom and younger lights became prominent; he had frequent troubles with his metropolitan, Helladius; and, what must have been hardest of all to bear, he was accused of theological infidelities, of Antiochene tendencies, and even of tritheism.[3] He is last heard of at a council at Constantinople in 394 and it is probable that he did not survive long after.

His Historical Background

Gregory lived in a turbulent century. The legions of the empire were constantly at war in the effort to stem the inroads of the barbarians: against the Gauls and the Germans, the Persians and the warlike tribes in the vicinity of the Caucasus, especially against the Goths and Vandals sweeping in from the east and the north. Nor were the internal affairs of the empire any more pacific: the army had to be strong and inclined to be restive; this was the period when they were

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[1] This is the discourse which has come down under the title De sua ordinatione: see Daniélou, From Glory . . . , p. 6, note 20. The attribution of authorship of the creed is due to Nicephoras Callistus, Historia Ecclesiae, MG CXLVI, 784B.

[2] Daniélou, "Introduction" to edition of De vita Moysis, p. vi.

[3] Daniélou, From Glory . . . , p. 9.

the makers of emperors. The occupant of the throne was always in danger and tended to eliminate potential successors before they could eliminate him; the result had to be continual unrest, suspicion, and treachery.

The Church was inextricably involved in all of this. Her position had improved under Constantine's policy of toleration and the general cessation of persecution, but the motivation of the Emperor's initial attitude was political, the peace of the empire, and it was politics that determined his and his successors' dealings with the Church. His policy was most erratic: although proclaiming universal toleration he tried to cruch the Donatists and Arians, but interfered with the legitimate ecclesiastical authority to do it and then gave up when he saw little sign of success;[1] he convoked the Council of Nicea to deal with the Arian question (stressing unity, significantly enough: he had little interest in doctrinal fidelity, which at times he inclined to consider mere stubbornness)[2] and exiled the recalcitrant Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and Theognis, but recalled the latter two within three years, restoring them to their dioceses;[3] he brought back and met with Arius in 335,[4] and in the same year exiled Athanasius, who had

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[1] The Cambridge Medieval History, ed. H. M. Gwatkin and J. P. Whitney, Vol. I: The Christian Roman Empire and the Foundation of the Teutonic Kingdoms (2d ed. rev.; New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 5. In the following series of notes this will be referred to as CMH.

[2] Ibid., p. 14.

[3] J. R. Palanque et al., The Church in the Christian Roman Empire, trans. Ernest C. Messenger (of Vol. III of Fliche-Martin, Histoire de l'église; New York: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 112-14. In the following series this will be referred to as "Palanque."

[4] Ibid., pp. 123-124.

been accused by the Arian council of Tyre of political intrigue, allowing him no defence.[1]

Constantius was even worse, a vain, weak, suspicious man. He tried to legislate paganism out of existence but merely succeeded in producing irritation by his laws, which were not enforced.[2] He was openly favorable to the Arians, who had his ear at court, and inimical to all who were loyal to the faith of Nicea, especially Athanasius, whom he promised to support but repeatedly betrayed.[3] Julian, despite an undeservedly harsh judgment by posterity, was mild by comparison; he deprived the Church of its special privileges but rarely interfered in its affairs.[4] But his short interregnum and that of Jovian were followed by the accession of Valens, who supported the Homoeans and the Anomoeans and returned many of the orthodox bishops to exile;[5] from 369 until his death he actually persecuted the Church, though less bloodily than his pre-Constantinian predecessors, and brought more confusion into its affairs than had even Constantius.[6] It was not until after 375 that Gratian, and shortly later Theodosius, both greatly influenced by Saint Ambrose, gave their full support to the orthodox cause and assisted in quelling the political dominance of the various Arian forces.[7]

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[1] Ibid., p. 129; CMH, I, 128. [2] CMH, I, 97.

[3] Ibid., pp. 128-32; Palanque, pp. 165-82.

[4] Palanque, pp. 228-39; CMH, I, 78-80.

[5] CMH, I, 126, 137, 139; Palanque, pp. 316-17.

[6] Palanque, pp. 329-37; CMH, I, 139.

[7] Palanque, pp. 359-61; CMH, I, 126, 140-41. On all this Church-

Thus, although the Church experienced extreme internal struggles during the fourth century, they were made far more complex by being intertwined with a political situation itself far from simple. To a certain extent, imperial policy toward the Church could be considered responsible for the difficulties, inasmuch as the benefit of toleration had its negative side. There would be some truth in the oversimplification that the suspension of violent persecution made it possible for the Church to rise above the struggle for existence and begin to reflect on the meaning of the message entrusted to her, to penetrate it more deeply and express it more clearly.[1] There had, of course, been heresies in abundance during the fiercest periods of persecution, but hardly as closely concentrated as they were in the fourth century. The earlier errors of Sabellianism and Adoptionism were by no means dead; Arianism provoked especially violent reactions on both sides because of the fundamental nature of its attack and the logical and semantical problems raised by the sophistical method and evasions of its proponents; it brought with it the extreme rationalist form of the Anomoean party, led by Eunomius, and made possible the anti-intellectualist approach of the Homoeousians or semi-Arians; it was at least partially the cause of the Apolinarian errors with regard to the person of Christ and the Macedonian attack on the divinity of the Spirit, and even provoked by reaction the by no means negligible current of tritheism which

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state question, see Luigi Sturzo, Church and State, trans. Barbara B. Carter (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), I, 27-43.

[1]See Gregory's intriguing description of the way in which theological questions were on everyone's lips: De deitate Filii et Spiritus sancti, MG 3. 557B.

keeps cropping up throughout the century.

Gregory contended vigorously and brilliantly with every one of these heretical currents, again drawn into the battles largely as a result of his allegiance to his warrior brother; not infrequently, it appears, he bore as well as delivered attacks. And yet, paradoxically, there are relatively few references to these personal struggles in his writings, with the exception of the letters; in his polemical works, with the exception of that against Eunomius, he is attacking heretical doctrines, not heretics. His writings are, for the most part, pervaded by a calm which is especially impressive when they are considered against their historical background; one could easily gather the impression that, with the exception of the heresies themselves, the troubles of his time had little effect on him. His constant theme is God and His dealings with men, the οἰκονομία: there is a strange contrast between his open curiosity with regard to all things scientific and his habitual silence on the events of his time.

These considerations help to answer the intriguing question of what motivated Gregory to concentrate on the problem of how man can know God. That he was forced to consider it in order to repel the errors of Eunomius (and, incidentally, the vicious attack on his beloved brother which the heretic had waged even after Basil's death) is evident but, I think, insufficient. He is also very much occupied with consolidating Basil's work of founding Eastern organized monasticism, by giving a theological basis to the asceticism and pursuit of perfection of the monks.[1] He is, too, of a fundamentally speculative cast of

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[1] See Jaeger, Two Rediscovered Works . . . , passim.

mind and has received much on which to speculate, not only from his reading, but especially from his contacts with Basil and Macrina and Gregory of Nazianzus; all have been very deeply practically concerned with knowing and loving God. Fundamentally, it appears that this is the concern that is most congenial to his spirit: he can discourse profoundly and eloquently to the monks and to his congregations on the knowledge and love of God because these are the interests which are closest to his heart and germane to his temperament. The absorption in union with God is the key to all his thought, along with the tendency to make that union as far as possible intelligible.[1]

Gregory undoubtedly attained the stage of mystical experience and has a strong claim to the title so frequently conferred upon him, "father of Christian mysticism."[2] Not, of course, that this would imply that he is the first Christian to have attained such experience: he himself frequently refers to St. Paul's being "rapt to the third heaven" (II Cor. 12:2-4). But he may well be the first both to have had such experience and to attempt to give an explanation of the conditions of its possibility and its significance which could be incorporated into theology; at least he is the most prominent source for the later mystical tradition in the East and, in great part, even in the West.[3] These

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[1] Walter Völker, "Die Ontologie Gregors von Nyssa in ihren Grundzügen," Aus der Enge in die Weite. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kirche und ihres Volkstums (Festschrift G. Biundo), p. 16, note 4, points out that Gregory's interest in the problem is due not only to polemics but also based on his own spirituality: his realization of the mystery of God and his own mysticism.

[2] See, e.g., Amand, Fatalisme . . . , p. 406, note 2.

[3] Daniélou explains the Eastern mysticism founded by Gregory as based on the opposition of participation and (the divine) transcend-

considerations will enter into the following discussion.

His Writings

Although the writings of the Bishop of Nyssa are usually distinguished according to a number of traditional genres, it is most convenient to consider them as falling into two primary categories, which might be called speculative and practical.[1] But it must be remembered that this is by no means an absolute distinction; probably none of the works is purely one or the other. Only those which are of special importance for this study will be described here; accounts of the others can be found in the manuals.[2]

First, however, a few words must be said about the question of chronology. The dating of the great majority of Gregory's works is only tentative. Daniélou has concerned himself with the problem in recent years, and the dates understood here are taken from his writings on the subject where possible, otherwise from Quasten.[3] Since any

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ence: "La colombe et la ténèbre dans la mystique byzantine ancienne," Eranos-Jahrbuch 1954, Bd. XXIII: Mensch und Wandlung, pp. 389-418.

[1] Gaith (La conception . . . , p. 9) claims that some of his writings are meant for an élite, others for non-philosophers: his conception of things never varied, but at times he masks his original ideas in order to avoid shocking the common folk. But often even the original ideas themselves are not clear, because of his lively sense of mystery.

[2] See, e.g., Quasten, Patrology, III, 255-82.

[3] To avoid proliferation of footnotes, I list here (in the order of their publication) the works of Daniélou in which the most helpful discussions of probable dates are to be found: "Introduction" to his edition of De vita Moysis; "La colombe . . ."; "La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse," Revue des sciences religieuses, XXIX (1955), 346-72; the "Introduction" to From Glory . . . . Quasten's relevant information is in the section referred to in note 2 supra.

Daniélou inclines to base some of his arguments concerning

discussion of development in Gregory's thought can be no more reliable than the dating of his works, we will say little on that subject and even that will be conjectural.[1] Nevertheless, for the reader who may be interested in the possibility of some progression in his thought, when a number of texts are adduced in witness to any given theme, they will be presented in the presumed chronological order of the works. In the following paragraphs these dates are mentioned when the works are described. A detached note in tabular form at the end of this chapter lists all of the works of Gregory referred to in the course of this paper with the abbreviations used for them in the notes and with their tentative dates.

What are here referred to as the speculative works include all those on strictly dogmatic subjects, most of which are polemically directed, in which Gregory is principally concerned with presenting and defending the traditional teaching of the Church, as well as those in which he allows himself a freer hand in trying to penetrate various aspects of the divine plan concerning which there is no clear or detailed ecclesiastical teaching.

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chronology on references, frequent in Gregory, to his gray hairs or old age: see, e.g., De infantibus praematurе abreptis, MG 3. 161AB; In Canticum Canticorum, MG 1. 764C (Jaeger ed., VI, 13.18-21); De vita Moysis, MG 1. 300B; Ep. 11, MG 3. 1044A (Jaeger ed., VIII, Part 2, 39); Contra Eunomium, MG 2. 1113CD (Jaeger ed., I, 403.6). Leys's remark is pertinent here: "On se demande si la mention, en plusieurs traités, du 'grand âge de l'auteur' ne serait pas simplement de style" (L'image . . ., p. 22, n. 3). This is indeed likely, since at the time of writing the last of the references just given Gregory could not have been more than fifty years old, and since he probably did not live to be sixty.

[1]But I would be reluctant to go as far as Leys, who claims that there is no reason to suspect any significant development in Gregory's thought over the period covered by his writings; he quotes Isaye in support of this conviction (L'image . . ., pp. 21, 22 and n. 1).

The earliest of the works in the former category is the treatise already referred to Contra Eunomium, the four parts of which were composed at intervals between early 381 and early 383; it is the longest and in many respects the most important of his writings. He takes the radical Arian's arguments point by point, quoting and refuting them in great detail, in the process also developing in detail, although unsystematically, his own theology of the Trinity. In 381, also, he wrote the Dialogus de anima et resurrectione qui inscribitur Macrinae, in which many of the more important later themes are already introduced indirectly into the discussion of immortality, Christian doctrine concerning the destiny of man, and the errors of the pagan philosophers.[1] (This actually belongs as well to the next group of treatises.) The Antirrheticus adversus Apolinarium, of the winter of 381-82, while one of the most important patristic writings dealing with that heresy, is of little interest for our purposes. To this category belong, too, the small treatises on Trinitarian theology which are grouped in the first part of Volume Three of Jaeger's edition; no firm date is available for most of them, but they can probably be assigned safely to the period of about five years after the Council of Constantinople when Gregory was especially preoccupied with these controversies.

Of the more freely speculative works, one of the earliest and most important is the De hominis opificio, which is only ostensibly exegetical; it was probably written early in 379. The extremely important theme of man as the image of God receives its first full devel-

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[1] Gaith (La conception . . . , p. 23) declares this "son traité philosophique par excellence"; there is a useful outline of it in Gronau, Poseidonios . . . , pp. 220-21.

opment here. Its value in the discussion of the means of knowing God will soon become apparent. The Oratio catechetica magna, perhaps written early in 384, seems to be a compendium of Christian doctrine for the use of teachers but employs a much more metaphysical than Scriptural approach; it is especially valuable as a more or less systematic summary of Gregory's theology.[1]

The writings referred to here as practical cover a number of literary classifications, including sermons, encomia, biography, exegesis, and epistles; what they all have in common is a concern with the "life according to virtue," its importance, its means, and its goal. They often contain a considerable amount of speculative material, but their aim is always the direction of conduct, or personal rather than speculative knowledge.

The first of these is Gregory's earliest work, the De virginitate, written late in 370 or early the next year before he became a bishop. It contains an initial approach to his doctrine concerning the aspiration toward a life of perfection and is of interest primarily for some very strongly Platonic passages. Ten years later he wrote the Vita Macrinae, extolling his sister after her death as a model of Christian perfection; on the next New Year's Day, 381, he performed a like service in the Encomium in fratrem suum Basilium.

The great series of Lenten sermons begins with those De oratione Dominica in 385; here again the conception of man as image of God is brought into prominence. Beginning with 387, the following Lents

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[1] Daniélou proposed 383 in 1954 ("La colombe . . . . ," p. 391), early 387 in 1955 ("La chronologie . . . ," p. 365), and the winter of 383-84 in 1961 (From Glory . . . , pp. 8-9).

saw the successive appearance of the homilies De beatitudinibus (the sixth deals with the pure of heart and the promise that they shall see God), In Psalmorum inscriptiones, In Ecclesiasten, and In Canticum Canticorum (390). All of these, especially the last, are of great importance for Gregory's spiritual and mystical doctrine, and consequently as well for the question of knowing God. This is summarized and exemplified in the allegorical consideration De vita Moysis, of about 392, and finally recapitulated in the De instituto Christiano which followed it shortly; the last is apparently his final legacy to the monks who came to him for instruction in their spiritual efforts.

The available texts of Gregory's writings are either good or bad. Good are those which have so far been published in the series initiated and pursued through many difficulties until his death by Jaeger, assisted in latter years by a number of collaborators; the series is being continued under the direction of Langerbeck. The volumes which have appeared to the date of the writing of this study include the Contra Eunomium, the minor dogmatic works, the homilies on the titles of the Psalms, on Ecclesiastes and on the Song of Songs, the ascetical works and the letters.[1] Since the attempts of the Maurists to edit these works were interrupted, and what they had accomplished destroyed, in the French Revolution of 1789, this will be the first critical edition of the great majority of the treatises.

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[1] Gregorii Nysseni Opera, auxilio aliorum virorum doctorum edenda curavit Wernerus Jaeger (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952-). Vols. I and II: Contra Eunomium Libri (1960); Vol. III, Part 1: Opera Dogmatica Minora (1958); Vol. V: In inscriptiones Psalmorum et In sextum Psalmum de octava; In Ecclesiasten homiliae (1961); Vol. VI: In Canticum Canticorum (1960); Vol. VIII, Part 1: Opera Ascetica (1952); Part 2: Epistulae (2d ed.; 1959).

For most of the works, therefore, which have not yet appeared in the Jaeger edition, recourse must be had to that in the Patrologia Graeca of Migne, which is merely a reprint, introducing many errors, of the editio princeps edited by the Jesuit, Fronton le Duc, and published by Claude Morel in Paris in 1615 and again, with the addition of works discovered in the interim, in 1638. This situation is only partially alleviated by the appearance in the "Sources chrétiennes" series of the De vita Moysis and the De hominis opificio,[1] by partially critical editions undertaken in the last century of the Oratio catechetica and the De anima,[2] and by a recent, well-annotated translation in the "Ancient Christian Writers" series of the homilies on the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes.[3]

In all cases the best texts available have been employed. The footnote references will always be given to the text of Migne, as the most easily available, but also to the Jaeger edition when that exists. References to the Migne edition can be found easily in the "Sources chrétiennes," which reproduce the Migne column numbers and divisions in their margins.[4]

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[1]Grégoire de Nysse, La vie de Moise, ou Traité de la perfection en matière de vertu, translated with introduction by Jean Daniélou ("Sources chrétiennes," 1bis, with critical text; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1955); La création de l'homme, ed. J. Laplace with notes by Daniélou ("Sources chrétiennes," 6; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1943).

[2]J. H. Srawley, The Catechetical Oration of St. Gregory of Nyssa ("Cambridge Patristic Texts"; Cambridge: University Press, 1903); Gregorius Nyssenus, De anima et resurrectione cum sorore sua Macrina dialogus, ed. J. G. Krabinger (Leipzig: Gustav Wittig, 1837).

[3]Gregory of Nyssa, The Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes, translated with notes and introduction by Hilda Graef ("Ancient Christian Writers," 18; Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1954).

[4]References to Gregory's works will be made in the following

This thesis has been written mainly from analysis of the primary sources, Gregory's own writings; many of the works and articles on him have, however, been consulted, and often taken into account. An excellent bibliography of work done up until 1960 is available in Quasten,[1] while Völker provides a comprehensive and critical examination of scholarly investigations dealing with Gregory from the early nineteenth century until 1955.[2] The writers who have been found most helpful, even when their conclusions have been rejected, are Daniélou, von Balthasar, Leys, Völker, and Merki.

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manner. First the title is given, usually in the abbreviated form indicated in the table on the next page (p. 36); this is immediately followed by the number of the chapter, homily, book, etc., as the particular work may require.

The next symbol is the reference to the Migne text, for all the works that are found there; this is indicated by "MG" and the numbers 1, 2, or 3, which indicate volumes XLIV, XLV, or XLVI, respectively, in Migne's series of works of the Greek Fathers, which contain Gregory's works. The number immediately after these refers to the column of Migne's volume.

The next reference, introduced by the symbol "J", is to the Jaeger text if that is available. The first number refers to the volume and its parts, if the latter are separately bound: thus "8/1" or "8/2" refer to the first or second part, respectively, of Volume Eight. The following numbers refer to page and line(s) of the text.

There is a special kind of reference in J 2, where the third book of the Contra Eunomium is subdivided into ten tomi; these are indicated by "C. Eun. 3/1, 3/2," etc.

Finally, in references to the De vita Moysis, the number 1 immediately after the title signifies the first part (introduction and Historia), and 2 indicates the second part (Theoria); the number after this, introduced by the symbol "#", is the paragraph number of the Daniélou text.

[1] Patrology, III, 254-96, passim.

[2] Völker, Gregor . . . , pp. 8-22.

Approximate Chronological Table of Gregory's Works

DATE	TITLE	ABBREVIATION
371	De virginitate	Virg.
379	De hominis opificio	Hom. op.
	Apologia in hexaëmeron	Hex.
	In sanctam Resurrectionem oratio tertia	In Res. iii
	In quadraginta martyres	
380	Vita sanctae Macrinae	
381	Encomium in fratrem suum Basilium	
	De anima et resurrectione	De an.
	In suam ordinationem	
381-83	Contra Eunomium Libri	C. Eun.
382	Antirrheticus adversus Apolinarium	Adv. Apol.
383	De deitate Filii et sancti Spiritus	De deit.
	In diem luminum: de baptismate Christi	In d. lum.
384	Oratio catechetica magna	Or. cat.
	Ad Eustathium, de sancta Trinitate	De Trin.
	Ad Simplicium, de fide	De fide
	Ad Graecos (ex communibus notionibus)	Com. not.
	De vita sancti Gregorii Thaumaturgi	Vit. Greg.
385	Adversus Macedonianos: de Spiritu sancto[1]	De Spir.
	De oratione Dominica	Or. Dom.
386	Contra fatum	
	Ad Theophilum, adversus Apolinaristas	
	In sanctum Stephanum protomartyrem	In Steph.
	In diem natalem Christi	Nat. Chr.
387	De beatitudinibus	Beat.
388	In inscriptiones Psalmorum	In Ps.
389	In Ecclesiasten homiliae	In Eccl.
390	In Canticum Canticorum	In Cant.
	Ad Ablabium, quod non sint tres dii	Non tres dii
392	De vita Moysis	Vit. Mos.
	De perfectione	De perf.
	De professione Christiana	
	De instituto Christiano	De inst.

[1] Jaeger (J 3/1, p. vi) proposes that the De Spiritu sancto may have been prepared for the use of the ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381.

CHAPTER III

THE "DISTANCE" BETWEEN GOD AND MAN'S MIND

The Difference between God and Creation

The root of what is problematic about human knowledge of God is the gulf, what may be called the ontological "distance," between man and his Creator: ". . . for God is in the heaven above, and you on the earth beneath" (Eccles. 5:2). Consequently, anyone who tries to understand the possibility and difficulty of such knowledge must take that "separation" into account. For, whatever glory may accrue to human nature in virtue of its dignity relative to the rest of the world, man is still insuperably a creature and that fact metaphysically conditions whatever relationship he may conceivably have with God.

Much of Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine about God is expressed in terms of the contrast between Him, as Creator, and His creation. Von Balthasar's claim that this is the fundamental opposition at the root of his religious philosophy is certainly true.[1] To support it he adduces the statement: "The supreme partition of all things is the division into created and uncreated."[2] This is surely a sufficiently predictable affirmation for a Christian thinker.

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[1] Présence . . . , p. 1. Cf. ibid., p. xvii: "Ce qui distingue Grégoire à la fois de Philon et de Plotin, c'est l'opposition radicale que ne mitige aucune zone intermédiaire, du Dieu trine et de la créature."

[2] C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 793, J 2. 209,19-20.

All the more startled, then, is the reader who consults the other texts offered by von Balthasar and finds, in practically the same solemn formula, the very different expression: "The supreme partition of all things (πάντων τῶν ὄντων) is the division into sensible and intelligible"![1] This in two passages, one written shortly before and the other some years after the one previously cited: there appears to be an abrupt contradiction. That it is only apparent will be clear in a moment; there is no difference in Gregory's doctrine, despite the difference of language. But it is worthy of note (although I have not seen it noted previously) that a more clear and succinct indication of the extent to which Gregory's metaphysical approach is influenced by Plato would be hard to find. For to posit as ultimate the distinction between sensible and intelligible is, as it were, Plato's signature; the significant point is that Gregory uses it here even though it partially misrepresents his own thought.

In the two passages introduced by the latter formula, he immediately proceeds to subdivide the intelligible into the uncreated Creator and created spirits;[2] at this point the two descriptions diverge, going on to consider the resultant divisions from differing points of view. Their development is worth considering here in order to form an initial impression of how Gregory treats the ontological contrast between God

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 333, J 1. 105,19-20; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 885, J 6. 173,7-9. The same division occurs again in a slightly different phrase in Or. cat. 6, MG 2. 25.

[2] The words here translated "intelligible" or "intellectual" (νοητός, νοερός, etc.), when they indicate substances rather than qualities, always (as far as I can see) refer to living beings in Gregory's works; the word "spiritual" (πνευματικός) still has too much of its (Pauline) moral-religious meaning to be available as a metaphysical term.

and creature.

The earlier passage, from the first book of the work against Eunomius, distinguishes the three categories on the basis of the way "difference" is realized in each. (The context of the whole passage is the Eunomian claim that the Son and Holy Spirit are substantially inferior to God the Father; its purpose therefore is to show that there can be no "more or less" in the Trinity. But this is not of importance for the present consideration.)

Sensible things, since they possess quantity, quality, and other properties, differ from one another according to the "more and less" intrinsic to such properties. Although this basis of distinction is inadmissible in the created intelligible nature, which does not possess such properties, there is another. God is the fount and source of all good, and all creation is inclined toward Him by its participation of that divine Good. But the created spirit stands on the borderline of good and evil, since it has the power to receive either. Therefore "more and less" is realized among these creatures proportionately to the appetitive impulse of each, by the extent to which they participate in the supreme Good through their freedom of choice: in a word, then, according to the excellence of their virtue.

But such difference is far from the uncreated nature, since God's good is not acquired nor His beauty derived through participation of some beauty superior to Him. Yet even in Him there is differentiation; it is, however, one befitting His nature and therefore in sharp contrast to the difference found in either class of creatures, in that it involves no "greater or less." The Trinity, "regarded in the high-

est perfection and incomprehensible excellence, has an unconfused and distinct difference in the properties belonging to each of the Hypostases."[1]

The distinction in the later text is based on the relation of each category to limits. The sensible is completely involved in limits: its quantity and quality divide it by bulk and shape and surface, all of which become limits of what knowledge can grasp about it. The intelligible, inasmuch as it transcends sense knowledge, is contained by no bounds and is infinite. The created intelligible, utterly dependent on the transcendent Good, is as it were continually created, its growth toward the better circumscribed by no limit: the present good, no matter how great it be, is at any time only the beginning of a more perfect one. Far otherwise is the infinity of the Uncreated, which is ever what it is and as it is, above any increase and insusceptible of any diminution in goods.[2]

It is clear that in both these passages Gregory is bent on affirming the paradoxical feature of the relationship between the spiritual creature and God: that God is infinitely far and yet calls the creature to a union with Him that is based on something it has in common with Him. The stress on both these apparently conflicting aspects of the same truth and on the tension between them will be a constant feature of the rest of his treatment of the problem.

Gregory never tires of proclaiming the absolute inferiority of all creation with regard to its Creator and its utter dependence on

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[1] C.Eun. 1, MG 2. 333-36, J 1. 105,19 - 107,22.

[2] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 885-88, J 6. 173,7 - 174,20.

Him. We are taught by Scripture that all things have their being from Him: although we can in no way understand how they were in Him before they came to be, we firmly believe that it is true.[1] No created thing is really the product of another; all are the work of God and of Him alone.[2] Creation declares its Creator by its beauty and its controlled harmony, by the inexpressible wisdom apparent in it;[3] it is His enveloping and dominating power that sustains all things in existence.[4] Yet there is no example of Him in creation, nor any being that is in any way comparable to Him.[5] "The intervening medium by which the uncreated nature is cut off from the created being is vast and impassable."[6] God is good by nature, and so lacks no good and is the source of all that is good; but the creature at any given moment is just beginning its growth in good by reason of its participation of a superior good.[7] All things and all times are equally present to Him; but the creature has its own proper definition and therefore has nothing in common with Him.[8]

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[1] Hom. op. 23, MG 1. 212B.

[2] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 316, J 1. 88,28 - 89,6; cf. Eph. 4:6; I Cor. 8:6.

[3] De an., MG 3. 25A-28A, 44AB.

[4] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 724, J 5. 406,5-7.

[5] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361A, J 8/1. 298,18-19; cf. C. Eun. 3/2, MG 2. 621A, J 2. 55,15-19.

[6] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 933A, J 1. 246,14-16; cf. 1, MG 441, J 1. 205,2-6.

[7] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 336, J 1. 107,4-10; 3/6, MG 797, J 2. 212, 5-14.

[8] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 368B, J 1. 136,24-27, 137,8-13.

The details of this contrast as Gregory presents them, and in particular his analysis of its ontological basis, are interesting and revealing on examination. God is "the really Real" (τὸ ὄντως ὄν: Gregory often employs this characteristically Platonic phrase, and always in reference to God), the being who has existence by His own nature, ever the same without increase or decrease, perfectly self-sufficient, alone desirable, participated by all but undiminished by the participation; nothing else, whether sensible or intelligible, really subsists, nor can it be without participating being.[1] "Nothing can exist without having its existence in that which is" (or "in Him who Is": ἐν τῷ ὄντι).[2] "He gives beings the power to come to be and to remain in existence; and whatever is considered as outside of Him is non-being (ἀνυπαρξία), for whatever is outside of what is is not in existence."[3]

An intriguing complex of concepts is employed to express this "distance" between God and creature; to determine their precise reference is extremely difficult, although the general import is sufficient-

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[1] Vit. Mos. 1, MG 1. 333A-C, D 2. ##23-25; cf. C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 989B, J 1. 294,24 - 295,2.

[2] Or. cat. 25, MG 2. 65D. There is a fascinating ambiguity in many instances where Gregory uses an oblique case, with the result that it is difficult or impossible to tell whether he intends the (biblical) ὁ ὤν or the (Platonic) τὸ ὄν ; see, e.g., C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 468, J 2. 312,12-20; MG 469, J 314,19-26; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 781, J 6. 36,20; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 333B, D 2. #25.

C. H. Dodd, in The Bible and the Greeks (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), p. 4, points out that Philo's practice is to alternate the two terms: "Thus while keeping close to biblical language he was able to suggest the identity of the God of personal religion with the Absolute of philosophy."

[3] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729, J 5. 406,14-17. The phrase translated "is not in existence" is ἐν τῷ εἶναι οὐκ ἔστιν

ly clear. While they are evidently related to time and space, there are convincing reasons for believing that they are regarded as ontologically more fundamental than these. To a certain extent translation of them must be arbitrary: the same English word could easily be used to express two or three of the Greek terms, while it is not at all clear that the words in the original are intended to be completely synonymous.

διάστημα could be expressed by its cognate "distance," with the proviso that it is not to be understood in a spatial sense; it involves an analogy similar to that used in expressing transcendence by "beyond" or "above." For purely practical reasons, however, that translation will be avoided here, since διάστημα refers to something other than the "distance" of the creature from God of which use has been made already (although, as the following exposition will show, it is not unrelated to that concept). It could also be expressed by "separation," with reference to the normal meaning of the verb from which the Greek noun is formed. The best English word for it is probably either "interval," the musical connotations of which might inhibit understanding it in a spatial sense, or "apartness," which may be sufficiently abstract to avoid the same difficulty. Leys takes the alternative course of using in French the neologism "distension"; that may well be the most viable procedure.[1]

Another difficult word is ἀκολουθία; it can be rendered by "sequence" and, in its frequent logical contexts, by "consequence." τάξις could normally be translated by "order" or "arrangement," but

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[1] L'image . . . , p. 28, n. 2.

Gregory often employs it in its Neoplatonic quasi-technical sense of "grade" or "level" in the hierarchy of being.

Perhaps the most difficult word of the group, finally, is αἰών. "Time" is unsatisfactory and, in fact, a rank mistranslation; "age," while probably the best approximation available in English, still leaves much to be desired. Even its English cognate, "eon," would be misleading since its basic meaningiis "a very long time"; consequently, when the word occurs in a context in which its meaning is important it will simply be transliterated as aion in the following pages.

The truth to be stressed by this strange and formidable vocabulary is that there is in God no "interval," no "apartness," no intrinsic distance, and that consequently He has no parameter (the verb παραμετρεῖν frequently occurs in these contexts): there is nothing "commensurate" or "coextensive" by which He could in any way be measured. Thus He is not in place or time, for they are from Him: "neither measured by ages nor concurrent with times, but stable in Himself and based upon Himself." Free of interval and quantity, uncircumscribed, He holds in Himself the ages and all the creation in them, exceeding their boundlessness in every direction by the eternity of His own nature. He is in no way limited and therefore not bound by the characteristics which we see to be distinctive of the state of creatures.[1]

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[1] These notions, it may be remarked, have primary application in Gregory's Trinitarian doctrine: the Son has His ὑπόστασις from His Cause, the Father, ἀδιαστάτως ; though distinct, the divine Persons are not separated from each other by time, place, function, will, activity, or πάθος; there is no extension in the divine will, which

These characteristics, of course, are precisely those of which we have been speaking. In fact, all the concepts in question are nicely summed up in a single sentence, which must be presented here in the original: ἡ μὲν γὰρ κτίσις πᾶσα . . . κατά τινα τάξεως ἀκολουθίαν γεγενημένη τῷ τῶν αἰώνων διαστήματι παραμετρεῖται.--"For all creation, having come to be by some orderly sequence, is measured by the apartness of the aiones."[1] Reason sees that this is the property of all creation. Consequently creation is universally limited and enclosed within its own measures; every creature, an especially interesting passage affirms, exists only as long as it remains within the limits of its own nature: for it to "go out of itself," in the sense of managing to escape those limits native to it, would be simply to go out of existence.[2] These limits are, at least in a sense, specified: God creates all things in the aiones which, along with the place in them, He has laid down as a "receptive area" (χώρημα δεκτικόν) in which to situate them. Gregory even goes so far, at least once, as to state explicitly that all creatures must have their existence wholly either in place or in time.[3]

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operates ἀχρόνως and ἀδιαστάτως. C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 364, J 1. 134,1-2; Com. not., MG 2. 180C, J 3/1. 25,8-11; Non tres dii, MG 2. 129B, J 3/1. 51,16-21.

[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 364, J 1. 134, 8-11.

[2] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729, J 5. 411,14 - 412,14.

[3] Therefore life is split between hope and memory according to the division of time: C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 368, J 1. 136,22-24.

Detailed references for the two preceding paragraphs would be so chaotic as to be meaningless. There are four passages in the Contra Eunomium in which the doctrine is presented in especially detailed fashion: 1, MG 2. 364-68, J 1. 133,27 - 136,27; 2, MG 933, J 246,16 - 247,4; 3/6, MG 793-96, J 2. 209,26 - 210,22; 3/7, MG 812-13, J 225,11 - 227,5.

Although the general outlines of the doctrine are clear, there are some intriguing ambiguities. These are strikingly illustrated in the conclusions reached by three outstanding contemporary scholars who have analyzed this aspect of Gregory's thought with a view to specifying the radical metaphysical concept involved in it. No two of the conclusions agree.

For von Balthasar the fundamental notion is διάστημα, which he explicates as the separation of the limits of a limited being so that they are in some sense apart from one another. He is able to produce in support of this interpretation Gregory's explicit statement: "διάστημα is nothing other than creation."[1]

Daniélou, on the other hand, sees ἀκολουθία as the central concept. In an impressive article he has indicated the multiple analogies according to which it unifies many aspects of the saint's thought; he also proposes the "prime analogate":

> The property of the creature is ἀκολουθία, succession, order according to before and after. It cannot escape this ἀκολουθία: it is the created condition itself, enclosed in the categories of space and time. Notice that Gregory does not limit this condition to the material world alone, but to every creature: this is doubtless a trace of Posidonian influence. At any rate, we are at the metaphysical root of ἀκολουθία, which constitutes its common character through its diverse manifestations. . . . In reasoning, in life, in the universe: nothing can escape this condition of being spread out in a temporal succession.[2]

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[1] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729, J 5. 412,14; for von Balthasar's discussion, see Présence . . . , pp. 1-5.

[2] "Akolouthia chez Grégoire de Nysse," Revue des sciences religieuses, XXVII (1953), 231. For the application of this notion to Scriptural exegesis, see ibid., p. 237. It is doubtful whether it refers to time exclusively in this context, although how it differs is not clear; it can signify almost any kind of order, as the examples in Daniélou's article illustrate.

And finally, von Ivanka claims to discover the radical notion in αἰών:

> . . . [it is] not only space and time, but what first makes space and time possible as given relations of things, a medium of creation created before things; it not only causes the spatial and temporal condition of things, but even determines their createdness (Geschöpfcharakter) to the extent that creation is something that possesses being not in itself but gradually.[1]

Gregory refers to aion as a "separative notion" (διαστηματικὸν νόημα) and as that which envelops all creation; he often uses it by metonymy to mean creation itself.[2]

There can be no doubt that all three concepts are basic and all interconnected: they could even be said to be equivalent in the strict logical sense of mutual implication (without thereby implying that they have exactly the same meaning). Probably all three of the scholars just mentioned would admit that all three notions are "properties" of the creature qua creature.

The question at issue, then, is merely which concept is ontologically more fundamental; the one chosen here is διάστημα. αἰών appears, from what has just been said, to be included under it as a particular (even if all-embracing) instance. ἀκολουθία, too, involves the more restricted notion of order; in addition, as the above

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[1] Endre von Ivanka, "Vom Platonismus zur Theorie der Mystik. Zur Erkenntnislehre Gregors von Nyssa," Scholastik, XI (1936), 181.

[2] See, for example, De Spir., MG 2. 1321B, J 3/1. 103,18; In Eccl. 8, MG 1. 752D, J 5. 440,3-6. There is no word which at all corresponds to this in English, but the word saeculum seems often to be used in a similar way in medieval Latin; compare, for instance, its meaning in the second line of the Dies irae: "Solvet saeclum in favilla." Consider, too, the way saeculum can mean "world" (cf. "secular") and thereby lay aside its normal temporal reference: it is a similar phenomenon that is being observed in the present context in Gregory's use of aion.

quotation from Daniélou clearly shows, it seems to be too explicitly temporal in meaning.[1] διάστημα, on the other hand, is more abstract, less physical in connotation, and seems in general more applicable to every aspect of creaturely being, rather than to one aspect discoverable in every creature. But it must be admitted that any solution of the problem is necessarily tentative, since Gregory is not sufficiently explicit about the exact meanings he gives the terms.

Διάστημα, then, is not the distance between God and creature, but is its ontological ground: the creature is other than God precisely because it is totally, in its every aspect, somehow "apart" from itself, not completely self-identical; consequently it has its being "gradually" and is measurable by some reality other than itself. God, on the other hand, is transcendent, that is, infinitely "distant" from every creature, precisely inasmuch as He has no limits and therefore no διάστημα in Himself: He is what He is totally, simultaneously, without any "gradation" and so immeasurably. For Gregory, it must be noticed, all this is merely explicitating what we <u>mean</u> when we say that we are created, He is not.

At any rate, from the radical source of difference between God and creation denoted by the entire range of this vocabulary follow others. God is immutable, but the creature is essentially changeable: its very transition from not being to existence constitutes a kind of

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[1] That all, even spiritual, creatures are included somehow in aio<u>n</u> <u>aion</u> is certain; but does this mean that all are in time? The answer is "yes" if one takes literally the statement in <u>C. Eun</u>. 1, MG 2. 368A, J 1. 136,12-13: ". . . it is impossible for any of the beings that have come to be or are coming to be through creation not to have their existence completely either in place or in time." Daniélou evidently so understands it.

change.[1] Thus there is no beginning nor end, temporal or otherwise, in God, while the creature has beginning, middle, and end which are measured by temporal separations.[2]

The essential result of the "distance" thus established, as far as our hope of knowing God is concerned, is that there simply do not exist in Him the categories which, or by means of which, our created minds can comprehend. The conclusions can be stated by Gregory himself; these texts are lengthy, but they indicate better than a paraphrase could how firmly he draws and expresses the implications of his doctrine:

> . . . the beings that fall within our range of comprehension either are such as to be completely involved in some separative dimension, or afford the notion of a spatial area in which each individual is conceived to exist, or come within our view by the circumscription of beginning and end, equally enclosed at either boundary by non-being (for whatever has beginning and end commences to be from non-being and comes to a halt in non-being), or, last of all, we comprehend something we experience by a corporeal composition of qualities, to which are linked decay, passivity, change, alteration, and the like.[3]

> . . . For every ascent and withdrawal of the mind beyond the ages will mount only so far as to realize how inexhaustible is what it seeks. The age and what are in them [sic] seem to be a measure and limit of the motion and activity of human reasonings; what transcend these remain beyond the reach and approach of thought, purified of all that can come within human comprehension. For where no form, nor place, nor size, nor measure resulting from time, nor anything else comprehensible can be conceived, the comprehensive power of the mind, too, seeking to grasp something about the ages and the creation in them, will of necessity sink down to its own kind and kin, failing in every way to reach the nature beyond reach.[4]

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[1] Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184.

[2] C. Eun. 3/3, MG 2. 681D-84D, J 2. 109,24 - 110,25; cf. the texts mentioned in note 3, p. 45 supra.

[3] Ibid. 2, MG 1104, J 1. 395,3-14; cf. 3/2, MG 621A, J 2. 55,11-19.

[4] Ibid. 1, MG 365, J 1. 135,23 - 136,7.

> . . . For sensible beauty, such as dwells here below in our world, appearing either in lifeless matter or in the fresh complexion of living bodies, our sense power is sufficient to marvel at and attain and make known to another by verbal description, using words as a sort of image of such beauty. But how can language present that of which the model escapes perception, when it can discover no means of description: no color of which to speak, no shape, no size nor formal proportion, nor any such nonsense at all? For what is completely formless and without figure, foreign to all quality and established far from whatever can be found in body and in sense--how could one make that known by means of such things as are grasped by sense alone?[1]

The creature cannot "get out of itself" in its knowledge any more than in its being: it is still confined to interval and age, and so it cannot know God as He is.[2] Consequently we use negative names to deny of Him all these characteristics in terms of which our knowledge proceeds.[3]

But since God is "pure of what we can comprehend," names which are used both of Him and of creatures do not have the same meaning in each case. Their meaning is proportionate to the nature of which they are spoken: God is good in His own way, as boundless source of good, while a creature is good only by participation, receiving all that it has from Him.[4] Actually all names applied to God are makeshifts, for He is nameless. This in itself is another aspect of the contrast, since all creatures are grasped, confined as it were, by the meanings of names.[5]

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[1] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361, J 8/1. 290,14 - 291,4.

[2] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729, J 5. 413,1-5.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1104, J 1. 395,14-17.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 441-44, J 1. 204,29 - 206,6; 3/10, MG 907, J 2. 308,21 - 309,6; Or. cat. 1, MG 2. 13AB.

[5] C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 473, J 2. 318,6-17.

From all these considerations, then, it is already clear that Gregory will not find knowledge of God easy. It is unlike all our "natural" knowledge: it involves entry on another and totally strange world, from which all we are familiar with is missing; consequently, if such knowledge be possible at all, it will be so under severe limitations and peculiar conditions.

The Extent of Human Ignorance

The conviction just enunciated is strengthened when one examines Gregory's approach to natural knowledge: his doctrine on man's knowing in general may well be considered agnostic. This is undoubtedly, at least in part, a reaction to the extreme rationalistic tendencies of the heretics, and particularly of Eunomius, with whom he was so often contending. But that it is more than a rhetorical, contentious device is evident from the frequency and intensity with which he stresses the weakness of all human knowledge, in his speculative as well as his polemical works. Before examining how man knows God, then, it can be instructive to consider the limitations on our knowledge--or the extent of our ignorance--of created things, ourselves included.

The trained mind, of course, does not content itself with appearances, but rationally examines the nature of the soul and the qualities of which the body is composed; thus in the search for the beautiful it employs the sensible with the intent of contemplating the intelligible.[1] But not only is creation incapable of surpassing its own limits: it cannot even know itself. It has not been able to grasp the

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[1] *Virg.* 11, MG 3. 364, J 8/1. 291,15 - 292,15.

essence of the soul nor the nature of the body, the whence of things nor the how of their coming to be from one another; it still has no idea of how not-being comes to be and being is resolved into non-being, nor how the opposites in this universe are harmoniously composed with one another.[1] Reason, in its difficulty with the questions that confront it, has constantly to resort to the little syllable πως ("somehow") as those who cannot walk take to a seat.[2] Nor does Scripture, when it tells us that heaven, earth, sea, times, ages, and the creation in them came to be, relate what each of them is nor their source nor the manner of their coming to be.[3]

When we behold the beauties of the heavens in all their diversity and order and our inquiring minds attempt to discern their natures, we cannot describe them but can only marvel; we are so far from being able to recognize the essential description of each of these things as if we had never even begun to perceive them.[4] To all the thousands of questions that occur to us about the nature of the universe, a sensible man can only reply that He alone who made all in wisdom knows the essence (λόγος) of creation; as for us, "through faith we understand that the ages were framed by a word of God" (Heb. 11:3).[5] Even of the elements of this world, although we have sufficient understanding to be

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[1] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 732, J 5. 415,17 - 416,10.

[2] In d. lum., MG 3. 584D.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 945, J 1. 256,25-28.

[4] Ibid., MG 933, J 247,4 - 248,1; cf. In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1012, J 6. 337,15-21.

[5] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 936-37, J 1. 248,4 - 250,2.

able to make use of them for the necessities of our life, we do not know the essential description (οὐσίας λόγος). Nor do we consider the lack of such knowledge a loss: curiosity about such things would be of no avail to our lives, and that is why Scripture avoids giving that kind of information.[1]

How things were in God before He created them is beyond our reason, and how they came into being from Him. We believe these things without inquiring into them, convinced that they are inexplicable and indescribable.[2] The special weakness of our rational (or "verbal": λογική) nature is our inability to express our contemplation of what is invisible: it seems to be beyond the power of words. That is why we are unable to give the essential descriptions of natural things and explain the source and manner of their subsistence.[3] There are, indeed, questions that a man should not even try to answer: what was before creation, what is beyond the things that we experience, what is the necessity of the things that come to be, and such others as are the hidden thoughts of God; these must be left for the Holy Spirit alone, "who searches the depths of God" (I Cor. 2:10).[4]

The limits of human ignorance have not even been approached yet. For we cannot even comprehend our own soul: its essence, its genesis, its composition, its relations to the body, its varied activities,

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 949, J 1. 260,10-27.

[2] De an., MG 3. 121A-24B; Hom. op. 23, MG 1. 212B; In Res. iii, MG 3. 664C; Or. cat. 11, MG 2. 44B.

[3] In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 632, J 5. 293,2 - 294,17.

[4] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 357C, D 2. #110.

its contrary impulses toward the invisible and toward matter, the variety of its passions and the unity that it has; we do not even understand the body itself, apart from its qualities.[1] Since all matter is divided by quantity and quality into mass, form, surface, and shape, its attributes become a limit of apprehension with regard to it, so that one investigating it can find nothing beyond these to grasp.[2] There is a problem of the one and the many in human nature: the one soul is present simultaneously in all the different senses of the body; it is true that this can be explained by adverting to the fact that man is made in the image of God, but it must be remembered too that one of the facets of his likeness to God is a participation of His incomprehensibility. Therefore we cannot even know the nature of our own minds.[3]

Human ignorance, in sum, is measureless. Further, it should be noticed that the implication of almost all the texts in which it is described is the argument that, a fortiori, we cannot hope to comprehend God Himself.

This investigation, then, has so far revealed that for Gregory man's knowledge is weak and his distance from God is great. This accumulation of obstacles--both the de facto weakness of man's knowledge of himself and the created cosmos, whatever its ultimate explanation, and the immeasurable gulf that stands, de iure, between God and His creation--would seem to force one clear conclusion: that for a creature to know God is simply out of the question. Such appears to be the whole

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 945-49, J 1. 258,1 - 260, 25.

[2] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 885, J 6. 173,13-17.

[3] Hom. op. 11, MG 1. 156AB.

import of the truths so far considered.

But that conclusion is, of course, unacceptable for a Christian; and it is not, in fact, Gregory's final answer. The aim of the following chapter will be to discover what grounds there may be for expecting that we can attain some valid, if difficult and incomplete, knowledge of God.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRESENCE OF GOD TO MAN

The purpose of this chapter is both to rectify the impression the previous chapter might leave, that knowledge of God must be impossible, and to establish one of the most important bases for the discussion of the ways by which that knowledge is actually acquired, which will be the business of the next chapter. These aims will be accomplished by a brief consideration of the meaning and importance of knowing God for human life, and then by development of the primary foundation for nearness to God: His image in man.

Knowledge of God as the Fulfillment of Man

To claim that some knowledge of God is possible for man is really a grave understatement. This is, in fact, what he exists for: to glorify God through what he understands of Him in His works.[1] Scripture often promises such knowledge: Gregory attends particularly to the promise of the sixth Beatitude that the pure of heart shall see God, and goes on to explain that one who achieved such vision would possess God in what he sees. For the normal meaning of "to see" in Scripture is "to possess."[2] The magnitude of the loss for one who ultimately fails to achieve such possession of God is simply beyond

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[1] *In Res.* iii, MG 3. 665C-68A.

[2] *Beat.* 6, MG 1, 1265A; *In Eccl.* 1, MG 1. 624, J 5. 285,8-12.

description.[1] But he insists, too, that such language and such a promise do not apply indiscriminately to any kind of knowledge about God: it is not merely knowing something about God that the Lord declares blessed, but possessing Him in some way within oneself.[2] In what this interior possession consists will be considered shortly.

This promise is so great as to exceed the highest bounds of bliss.[3] "For what could one conceive of more blissful than to see God?"[4] This attainment of bliss is the goal of the life of virtue, for it is the supreme height and recapitulation of all conceivable good.[5] From this realization appears what should be our proper attitude toward desire for this vision of God:

> . . . That it appears loftier than our comprehension is by no means any reason to abandon such desire in despair; rather, the greater reason shows the Sought to be, the more we ought to elevate our minds and raise them on high along with the greatness of Him we seek, lest we come to be completely outside of participation of the Good.[6]

The knowledge of which we are speaking, then, is a participation in which God is possessed and in which His bliss is communicated to us. The basis and effect of this participation is a likeness to God, in accord with the ancient doctrine that like can be known only by like.[7] More than once Gregory affirms:

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[1] Virg. 10, MG 3. 360, J 8/1. 288,18-22.

[2] Beat. 6, MG 1. 1269C. [23] Ibid., 1265A.

[4] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 889, J 6. 178,21-22.

[5] In Ps. 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 25,11-17; cf. Hom. op., MG 1. 137.

[6] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361, J 8/1. 291,4-9.

[7] Virg. 11, MG 3. 368, J 8/1. 296,1-9; cf. Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197AB.

> . . . Human bliss, by its participation of the really Real, to some extent becomes and is called what the nature of Him whom it participates is; and so the limit of human blessedness is likeness to the divine.[1]

This suggests a consideration of the doctrine which will soon be seen to be a fundamental key to the problem of how we can know God.

Man as the Image of God

As the previous chapter began by presenting the contrast between the reality of God and that of creatures, it is fitting to complete this one by a consideration, just as central to Gregory's thought, which introduces a modification of that contrast and so a ground for "contact" with God. The doctrine of the image of God in man is not, of course, new with Gregory: beginning with the first chapter of Genesis it is a theme frequently taken up in Scripture, and one which was of great importance to most of the Fathers of the Church. But it is particularly significant for Gregory, as Leys's monograph on the subject amply demonstrates, and none of the Fathers has found it as basic as he has for the solution of the problem of knowing God.[2]

Before his doctrine is presented in detail, however, there is some value in examining a modulation of the theme which appears in the course of its patristic development. The text of Genesis 1:26 states that man was made "in the image and likeness of God." The question naturally arises whether the two words represent different aspects of

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[1] *In Ps.* 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 26,8-11; *De an.*, MG 3. 97AB.

[2] *L'image . . .*, *passim* and especially p. 15; see also "La théologie spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse," *Studia Patristica*, ed. Kurt Aland and F. L. Cross, II, 499.

man's relation to God, or whether they are merely a hendiadys, an amplified expression of a single fact. For some of the Fathers, for instance, εἰκών (image) more or less represents the natural, and ὁμοίωσις (likeness) the supernatural, resemblance of man to his Creator; others find other differences in the meanings of the two terms. Is there any justification for seeing such a distinction in Gregory's image-doctrine?

His modern commentators are agreed that there is not. Daniélou, von Balthasar, and Gaith claim that there is no difference for him in the meaning of the expressions: the image is clearly in the supernatural order although Gregory, who makes no clear distinction of that from the natural, includes natural elements among its "marks" (for example,

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[1] For a consideration of this and similar questions in the doctrines of the Eastern Fathers, and for Gregory's place in that tradition, it would be hard to find anything better in English than the dissertation of Walter Burghardt, The Image of God in Man according to Cyril of Alexandria ("Studies in Christian Antiquity," ed. Johannes Quasten, No. 14; Woodstock, Md.: Woodstock College Press, 1957). Chapter I, pp. 1-11, treats of the question considered here under the title "Image and Likeness."

Among Gregory's predecessors St. Irenaeus, for example, has the kind of distinction mentioned above, although not expressed in these words; for him the image represents what is inamissible, such as reason and free will, while the likeness refers to such gifts as the possession of the Spirit, which can be lost and are restored through Christ (see Burghardt, ibid., p. 3).

This conflicts only apparently with the claim made here that in Gregory's time there is no clear distinction available between the natural and the supernatural. The latter corresponds only roughly with Irenaeus' distinction. For the supernatural is not simply what can be lost: even when grace and the gifts of grace are rejected, man is still in the supernatural order and cannot nullify--though he can refuse to follow--his vocation to a supernatural destiny. On the other hand there are, of course, (accidental) aspects of nature which can be lost. Even if Gregory were to make the distinction in question, he could hardly make it in these terms since "nature" (φύσις) means to him what is "native" to man, what he was created with, and therefore includes the gifts of grace and of original justice (see the references given in note 2, p. 5 supra, and Diekamp, Gotteslehre . . . , p. 69).

the intellect itself).[1] Leys attempts, with a degree of success, to discover a partial differentiation of the two terms, not with regard to the distinction of grace and nature, but rather in the form of a relationship of static to dynamic. While admitting that frequently Gregory uses the terms without making any distinction between them, he points out that there are a number of occasions in which "image" refers to the static aspect of the resemblance to God (whether in its original or in its ultimate state) and "likeness" is "the conquest or progressive realization of the εἰκών." His distinction, then, is "not, doubtless, as between two different things, but as between two aspects of one same reality."[2] This insight may be supplemented by the observation of Merki to the effect that, when Gregory uses "likeness" without reference to "image," his matrix is not the Scriptural theme, but rather the Platonic treatment of "assimilation to the divine" (cf. φυγὴ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ --". . . the flight [to the divine] is a becoming-like God . . ." of Theaetetus 176b).[3]

How does Gregory elaborate his own doctrine of the image? In a

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[1]Von Balthasar, Présence . . . , p. 89; Daniélou, Platonisme . . . , p. 52; Gaith, La conception . . . , pp. 45-46.

[2]Leys, L'image . . . , pp. 116-19. This usage by Gregory is likely a priori, since it is similar to that of the Alexandrians. For Clement and Origen, the image is what is given in creation, while the likeness is the spiritual perfection man is meant to attain and realized fully only in heaven. There is a hint at the end of Basil's (unfinished) Hexaëmeron that he intended to make the same distinction (see Burghardt, The Image . . . , pp. 3-4).

[3]See, for example: Or. Dom., MG 1. 1145AB; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1200C. Hubert Merki, Ὁμοίωσις θεῷ. Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa ("Paradosis," 7; Fribourg-i.-S.:Paulusverlag, 1952), p. 173; also his article, "Ebenbildlichkeit," in Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum, ed. Theodor Klauser, Bd. IV (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1959), p. 465.

typical statement he affirms simply that ". . . no one instructed in the divine mysteries can be unaware that life likened to the divine nature is familiar and according to nature for man."[1] "By his understanding (νοῦς) and reason (or "speech"?--λόγος) he is both product and imitation (μίμημα) of the pure divine nature."[2] This is the way we were created in the beginning: the likeness of God is no human accomplishment, but the gift of the divine liberality. All that is in our power is to purify it of the filth of evil with which we ourselves have overlaid and obscured it.[3]

The teaching is most fully developed in the work, The Making of Man, intended as a supplement to the Hexaëmeron which Basil at his death left incomplete (and thus professedly, it may be noted, a speculative exegesis of the Genesis account of the creation of man). In the introductory epistle, addressed to his brother Peter, the saint makes the startling statement that "no other existing being but the human creature has been made like to God."[4] No explanation of the exclusive character of the affirmation is given. Yet it appears that he means what he says. Nowhere, as far as I can discover, does he ever speak of the angels as being made in the image of God. He may even imply the contrary in the passage where, discussing the hostility toward man that prompted the Adversary, Satan, to lead our first parents "down the garden path" to their lapse from grace, he suggests that it may have been

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[1] In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 624, J 5. 284,18-20.

[2] Virg. 12, MG 3. 369, J 8/1. 297,24 - 298,2.

[3] Ibid., MG 372, J 300,7-15.

[4] Hom. op., intr., MG 1. 128A.

due to envy at the fact that it is man who is made "in the image."[1] Why Gregory should refuse the image to the angels must be a conjectural question, since he does not answer it: there is no apparent reason why the angels cannot possess all the characteristics he will associate with the content of the image. The only explanation I can tentatively propose for making it the prerogative of man alone is that the Image of the Father became man in the Incarnation.

What has come to be in the image has complete likeness to its archetype in every respect: exaggerated though it may seem, Gregory insists on this again and again.[2] The precise likeness to God consists in our life somehow imitating the transcendent essence, for God's life is far different from ours. Although His transcendence is unapproachable and beyond our grasp, the fragrance we acquire through the purity of the virtues substitutes for it in us, enabling us to imitate the most pure nature.[3] The essence (λόγος) of an image requires that everything in it be discernible also in its archetype; it is an image in the proper sense only as long as it lacks nothing of what belongs to its prototype, and in whatever respect it fails of that likeness it is not an image.[4]

This likeness to God is to be found in the soul of man.[5] As through His ineffable wisdom God can be by nature in created things

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[1] Or. cat. 6, MG 2. 31.

[2] De an., MG 3. 41C; cf. Vit. Mos., MG 1. 429A, D 2. #318.

[3] De an., MG 3. 89D-92A; In Cant. 3, MG 1. 824, J 6. 89,15-21.

[4] In Steph., MG 3. 720C; Hom. op. 11, MG 1. 156A.

[5] De an., MG 3. 52A, and cf. 41D-44A.

although His being is far other than theirs, so the soul can be in matter although essentially other than it.[1]

The creative divine Word brought men into being not from necessity but from superabundance of love: "for it was needful that neither His light be unbeheld nor His glory unwitnessed not His goodness not enjoyed, nor all the goods that can be observed in the divine life lie idle, with no one to share or enjoy them."[2] Thus the principal function of the image is to manifest God, to show forth His glory and goodness in the created world.[3]

Since man came into existence in order to be a partaker of the divine goods, he had to be equipped for the participation; this meant that he had to receive some kinship with the divine. So he was showered with a multitude of divine goods, all of which the account of the cosmogony indicates comprehensively by saying that he came into being in the image of God.[4] We conjecture that every conceivable opposite of evil is attributable to God and to His image, which is human nature.[5]

Gregory enumerates at length the characteristics that make the image what it is. They include purity, blessedness, freedom from passion and from any kind of evil, intelligence, speech, love (for without this there would be an alteration in the image), an ability to behold and scrutinize all things in a somehow unified act. For the soul has a natural power of regarding, scrutinizing, and discerning things;

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[1] De an., MG 3. 44AB.

[2] Or. cat. 5, MG 2. 21B.

[3] Cf. Leys, L'image . . . , p. 27.

[4] Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184AB; cf. Or. cat. 5, MG 2. 21B-D.

[5] De an., MG 3. 160C.

this is also part of the god-form grace of the image, for it too is to be found in God. Although this is multifold in all the senses of the living body, it is yet one: for it is one mind that acts through all the senses.[1]

The image includes, too, such gifts as incorruptibility, life, honor, grace, glory, and power. Like God Himself, our intellect is spiritual, incorporeal, free of all mass and measure of apartness.[2] And since God is incomprehensible, the image must be like Him in this too; otherwise the possession of contrary attributes would be a proof that the image was deficient. Consequently, our intellect escapes our knowledge (γνῶσις).[3] Again, as the image and likeness of Him who rules, with power, over all things, man is free. Subject to no necessity from without, he has the power to choose what seems good to him according to his own judgment ((or "purpose": γνώμη can be equally well translated by either word). "For ἀρετή is a reality without a master and powerful, and what is subject to necessity or coerced cannot be ἀρετή."[4]

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[1] De an., MG 3. 57B; cf. 89B; Hom. op. 5, MG 1. 137.

[2] Hom. op., ibid.; De an., MG 3. 160C, 41C (substituting διαστηματικήν for the clearly meaningless διὰ σημαντικήν).

[3] Hom. op. 11, MG 1. 156AB.

[4] Virg. 12, MG 3. 369, J 8/1. 298,10-16; Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184C. Cf. Daniélou's comment, referring to this passage, in the introduction to From Glory . . . , p. 12: Gregory "stresses free will more than intelligence in his analysis of man's likeness to God."

A word may be of use here on the meaning of the word ἀρετή, which Gregory uses frequently in his discussions of the life of perfection; it is, of course, a part of his extensive Platonic vocabulary. It is normally translated "virtue" in English, but the translation is inexact. This is so even in the case of Plato's use of the word, since he does not always use it in a moral sense: it can refer to physical as

The end of the life of virtue is blessedness, for this is the summit and limit of everything that we understand by "good." Although the transcendent Lord of all is alone properly and truly blessed, man can be so derivatively through participation, to some extent becoming and coming to be called what the nature that he participates is; thus the term of human blessedness is likeness to God.[1] "Mercy and doing good," too, "are things dear to God, and whatever may they dwell in they divinize and stamp him in imitation of the good, that he become an image of the first and pure Being that transcends every mind."[2]

Scripture bids us acknowledge nothing excellent in the soul that is not also proper to the divine nature, for since it is the likeness of God, nothing that is foreign to Him can belong to it; otherwise the essence of the image would not be preserved. Thus neither the passions nor mortality could have been natural to it in its beginning, or it would have been to that extent contrary to God.[3] And therefore if the soul free itself of passions and desire, this will constitute no

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well as to moral excellence. Thus its basic meaning would probably be better expressed by "excellence," "goodness," or "nobility," with all the range of meaning that those words are capable of assuming in English. This corresponds better, too, with its etymological relationship to ἄριστος, used as the superlative of ἀγαθός, "good."

That "virtue," at least in its normal sense of an acquired moral goodness, is inadequate to translate Gregory's use can be seen from the fact that he applies the word to God, whom he calls "all-perfect ἀρετή" (e.g., Vit. Mos., Prol., MG 1. 301A, D 1. #7). He does use it almost exclusively in a moral sense; nevertheless it is probably better in many cases to translate it by "excellence" or something less restricted in meaning than "virtue."

[1] Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197AB; In Ps. 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 25,11 - 26,14.

[2] De pauperibus amandis, MG 3. 464D-65A.

[3] De an., MG 3. 52A; Virg. 12, MG 3. 369, J 8/1. 298,3-8.

impediment to its contemplation of the beautiful; for the Beautiful itself has a way of drawing to itself whatever regards it.[1]

On the other hand, there must be a difference between man and God; otherwise the former would no longer be an image, but would have to be identical with God. The difference is, simply, that we are created and He is not: what He manifests in an uncreated way we show forth in a manner suitable to creation, like a little bit of glass reflecting the great sun. One immediate consequence of this essential difference is that, whereas He is immutable, the creature cannot exist without change. Even our passage from not-being to being is a change, accomplished by the divine will.[2]

Gregory's undoubtedly extreme emphasis on the degree of similarity to God inherent in the image may seem to conflict with this also emphatic mention of the necessity for difference between them. But the tension is radically inherent in the fact: ontologically, man is both immeasurably far from God and, at the same time, at least potentially awesomely near; this is the mystery (in the strict theological sense) of grace. But it may also be pointed out that he often stresses one aspect or the other in accordance with his immediate purpose. Thus, as Leys accurately shows, in his more positive speculative and ascetical works he is more likely to speak of the closeness of the image to its archetype, while in his polemic against the Arians, in which one of the principal aims is to save the transcendence of God, much more stress is

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[1] De an., MG 3. 89B.

[2] Ibid., 41BC; Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184CD.

laid upon the basic difference between them.[1]

Yet we once so participated that Good and it was so deeply in our nature that man seemed another such, formed in the most perfect likeness to the image of the prototype.[2] But man employed his free will to deliver himself to error, discovering for himself evil, which God had not created, although the beautiful and good were on every hand accessible to his natural power. He was like a man who would use the power of shutting his eyes in order to withdraw from the light. Thus was darkened the beauty and lost the grace of the image; the task of man in his present condition is to remove the filth which has, as a result of his fall, obscured it.[3] Now our nature is ever in motion and in need, drawn forward by hope and giving its motions renewed duration in memory; this is often a memory in shame, vainly seeking forgetfulness, and the need gives rise to insatiable desire. But when the soul becomes God-form it escapes these motions, transcending hope and memory and desire, imitating God's life, retaining only love and forming itself on Him it loves.[4]

Christ, for love of man (φιλανθρωπία), became the image of the unseen God in order to remake man in His image; to receive this

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[1] L'image . . . , pp. 23-24.

[2] Beat. 3, MG 1. 1225D. It may be noted that, although von Balthasar does not translate this passage, his comments (Présence . . . , p.88 and note 6) imply that he misunderstands the sense of the phrase "ὡς ἄλλο ἐκεῖνο." Leys, L'image . . . , p. 27 and n. 1, paraphrases its meaning exactly in affirming that man was constituted, by means of the image, a "Dieu hors de Dieu."

[3] Virg1, 12, MG 3. 369-72, J 8/1. 298,8 - 300,8.

[4] De an., MG 3. 92A-96A.

benefit we must be formed on Him and so to the beauty of the archetype, living in but not according to the flesh so as to become again what we were in the beginning.[1]

In a strangely beautiful image in his earliest work, Gregory affirms that the one chariot for the soul's ascent to God is to liken itself to the descending Dove, for whose wings David had prayed (Ps. 54:7). Years later, in his commentary on the Song of Songs, he resumes this theme once more: the Word summons the beloved soul to draw nigh the light and become beautiful by being fashioned to the form of the Dove in the light, the soul herself being "my love, my dove, my beautiful one" (Cant. 2:13).[2] This is the process in which the image is to be renewed and recreated.

The question spontaneously arises whether this teaching on the image in man does not, in fact, in some way diminish the transcendence of God. In order to understand why it does not, it is necessary to consider (even though it anticipates to some extent what will be more fully developed later) a distinction quite basic to Gregory's thought. With almost monotonous frequency, he employs in speaking of God such phrases as "what are contemplated about God" or "what are understood in the divine nature."[3] These, to some degree apprehensible, are sharply

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[1] De perf., MG 3. 269, J 8/1. 194,14 - 195,9.

[2] Virg. 11, MG 3. 365-68, J 8/1. 294,7 - 296,9; In Cant. 5, MG 1. 876, J 6. 159,2-4.

[3] E.g.: "τὸ περὶ αὐτὸ θεωρούμενον" (C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 769A, J 2. 186,14); "τὴν ἐπιθεωρουμένην τῇ θείᾳ φύσει . . . τελειότητα" (ibid. 3/7, MG 808, J 222,7-8); "τὸ περὶ αὐτὴν νοούμενον" (In Cant. 5, MG 1. 873, J 6. 157,20).

distinguished from the nature or essence to which they are referred; these are the divine "characteristics" with which the image is "stamped" and which constitute its resemblance to God. They truly belong to God and manifest Him profoundly, yet always partially and inadequately; none of them, and not even the totality of them, expresses His essence. The latter, therefore, remains perfectly transcendent.[1]

One interesting, and not unimportant, implication of this view may be mentioned. Leys indicates it, in opposition to both von Balthasar and Cherniss: there cannot be in man any image of the Trinity as such. For the distinction in unity of the Three belongs to the divine nature itself, not to what are "contemplated about it."[2]

What this chapter intended to achieve can now conveniently be summarized. Its primary purpose has been to complete the picture of which the previous chapter presented only one side. There attention was directed exclusively to the weakness of human knowing and in particular to its distance, grounded in that of man himself, from God. Here some balance has been restored by producing a complementary aspect of Gregory's thought: that man can and must come to know God. The possibility of such an approach, apparently impugned by the doctrine on the gulf between God and man, has been revived if not explained by presenting his teaching on the "contact" with God afforded by His image in man.

The investigation may now be continued with an examination of the means by which Gregory proposes to attain some knowledge of God.

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[1] See Leys, L'image . . . , pp. 26 (and n. 5), 27.

[2] Ibid., pp. 27, 93-94; von Balthasar, Présence . . . , p. 139, note 1; Cherniss, Platonism . . . , p. 37.

CHAPTER V

THE WAYS OF KNOWING GOD

Given the fact established in the last chapter, that knowledge of God is possible, and even necessary for the fulfillment of man's destiny, the next step in the investigation is to inquire in detail what means are at our disposal in order to acquire it. The problem is of great importance to Gregory and he devotes much attention to its solution. Nevertheless, he does not often treat of it explicitly nor with all desirable clarity, and his statements even appear at times to contradict one another. Only after an explicit consideration of many passages does it become clear that the basic weight of his doctrine is constant and consistent.

This chapter, then, will attempt to analyze in detail what may well be called his "five ways" (approaches to God, although not attempts to demonstrate His existence), and then to consider briefly how they are related to one another, in particular the degree to which each is independent of the others. This will be supplemented, finally, by a note concerned with the meaning in this doctrine of the notion of "analogy," which is evidently of central importance in this doctrine of how God can be known.

1. Through Created Beings

God made man rational in order that by his comprehension of the divine works he might glorify their wise and skillful Maker: for all

the diverse and highly complex creation cries out more meaningfully than any formula of words that He is great and wise.[1] By equipping the creation as a royal treasure-house before creating man, God indicated that in the world he was to be the witness of some of its wonders and lord of others, that through his enjoyment he might derive some understanding of Him who supplied them and through the beauty and magnitude of the visible trace the unutterable and incomprehensible power of their Maker.[2]

Every lofty thing in creation presents Him, even to the limited grasp of the "wise of this world"; what is thus apprehended is not, of course, His essence, but the attributes that can be known by their presence in His work. For just as a human artisan can be perceived by intelligence in the work into which he has put something of his art, so God's wisdom, for instance, or His goodness can be perceived in creation.[3] Although God is simple, we can get many different conceptions of Him from creatures; due to the weakness of our minds, this is the only way we have to understand what we can of Him.[4] Even to reason about the Trinity from the analogy of created things, though it would be invalid, might for this reason be pardonable.[5]

Another result of the weakness of our understanding is that it

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[1] In Res. iii, MG 3. 665C-68A.

[2] Hom. op. 2, MG 1. 133A; cf. De an., MG 3. 24C-28A; In Res. iii, MG 3. 664C-68B; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 377D-80A, D 2. ##168-69.

[3] Beat. 6, MG 1. 1268C-69A.

[4] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1069, J 1. 364,32 - 365,25.

[5] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 316A, J 1. 88,23-28.

can be led to the intelligible only through the sensible:

> The life of perception, exercised through the activity of the senses, has been given to [human] nature in order that knowledge of the things that appear may be a guide to the soul for awareness of the invisible, as Wisdom says that "from the greatness and beauty of the created works He who brings all to being can be analogously seen" (Wisd. 13:5). But human thoughtlessness sees not the wonderful through the appearances, preferring to wonder at what it sees.
>
> Since, therefore, the activity of the senses is ephemeral and short-lived, we learn from this lofty utterance that he who beholds these things beholds nothing. But one who is guided through these to the apprehension of Being, and who perceives, through those that swiftly pass, the abiding nature, and becomes aware of that which is ever the same, both sees the really real Good and possesses what he sees: for the vision of that Good is possession.[1]

This truth can be seen, too, in the names we employ to express what knowledge we have of God. We use negative names to indicate that He is apart from the things that are familiar to us, denying thereby that the conditions of our knowing apply to Him. Even our positive names refer only to attributes of God which we can know analogously from creation.[2] In this manner the Holy Spirit teaches us the divine mysteries through what is familiar to us, elevating us to a higher conception through analogy.[3] In this way, again, Abraham was able to use Chaldean astronomy in order to come to God, and Gregory Thaumaturgus to use the philosophy of the Greeks.[4] One whose heart is purified and sharp of hearing can be led by contemplating created things to the

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[1] In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 624, J 5. 284,26 - 285,12; cf. Virg. 11, MG 3. 364A, J 8/1. 291,15-17.

[2] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1104-05, J 1. 395,14 - 397,30.

[3] C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 780D-81A, J 2. 197,6-19; cf. 2, MG 916A, J 1. 230,26-30.

[4] Vit. Greg., MG 3. 901; cf. C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 940-41, J 1. 252,24 - 253,17.

darkness where God is.[1]

Finally, the culmination of this "guidance" (χειραγωγία) of the human soul through created things to their Creator is the raison d'être of the Incarnation itself, that ultimate condescension of God to the weakness of His creatures:

> For we think that the vision of the transcendent nature always takes place commensurately with the power of each of those who receive the divine epiphany: greater and more befitting God for those capable of reaching the height, less and of lesser worth for those who cannot reach what is greater. Consequently He does not manifest Himself to the life of men in the "economy" through the flesh in the same way as in the previous manifestations. But since all, as the Prophet says, "went away and were corrupted" (Ps. 13:3), and there was not, as has been written, anyone capable of understanding and seeking out the height of divinity, therefore the only-begotten Son, manifesting Himself to a fleshly generation, becomes flesh, abasing Himself according to the litleness of the recipient, or rather, as Scripture says, "emptying Himself" (Phil. 2:7), that nature might receive as much as it was capable of. . . .
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> If, therefore, all were able as was Moses to enter the dark cloud in which he saw things not to be beheld, or as the lofty Paul to be exalted above three heavens and receive unutterable instructions on matters beyond speech, or as zealous Elijah to be rapt up in fire to the ethereal region and not burdened with the dragging weight of the body, or as Ezekiel and Isaiah to see upon the throne of glory Him who is exalted over the Cherubim and glorified by the Seraphim--there would have come about no need at all for the epiphany of our God in the flesh, had all been such.[2]

A strange and extreme doctrine, indeed, and one which Gregory never repeats--but it makes the point of our need to know God through the medium of creation.

2. Through God's Activities

We understand of God only what we are able to learn through His activities. In them He who is invisible by nature becomes visible, for

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[1] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 380A, D 2. #169.

[2] Adversus Apolinaristas, MG 2. 1273, J 3/1. 123,1 - 124,9.

an agent can be "analogized" through an activity. Even in human products the producer can somehow be seen in the work in which he has incorporated his art.[1] This approach is necessary for us:

> . . . For if it were possible that the divine nature itself be beheld in itself and that we could discover through what were apparent to us what belongs and what is foreign to it, we would have no need at all of words or other testimony in order to apprehend Him we seek. But since He is loftier than the thought of the seekers, and we conjecture by analogy (στοχαστικῶς ἀναλογιζόμεθα) about what escapes our knowledge, it is utterly necessary that His activities lead us by the hand in our investigation of the divine nature.[2]

Consequently, His saints made Him known by the wonders of His works and the variety of the names of His power.[3] For His power is clear to be seen in His rule over creation, and whatever happens in wisdom is His word.[4] "Indeed," says Gregory, "in God, in our opinion, ἔργον is λόγος."[5] The context makes it clear that there is a play on words in this statement: λόγος is God's creative word, but it is also the intelligibility manifest in what He brings into being, and it is in this that creation utters His word.

Even through the divine activities, however, it is faith about Him that we acquire, not knowledge of what He is.[6] So again in human works: what we see in them is not the nature of the artist himself, but

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 960, J 1. 269,6-8; Beat. 6, MG 1. 1268C-69B.

[2] De Trin., J 3/1. 10,18 - 11,3.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 944D-45A, J 1. 256,15-21.

[4] De an., MG 3. 28A; Hex., MG 1. 88C.

[5] Hex., MG 1. 73A.

[6] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 916A, J 1. 230,26-30; the same idea is often repeated elsewhere.

the evidence of his knowledge and skill. Similarly we behold God's wisdom in the cosmos, for instance, or His goodness in the creation of man.[1]

God's activity itself, in fact, is incomprehensible.[2] We can speak at all only of those activities of which the knowledge "comes down to us": these we know of through what we can perceive.[3] But we cannot know His nature through these, for the content (λόγος) of any name that denotes one of His activities is different from the content of His nature.[4] And all the names we use for God refer solely to His activities, never to His essence.[5]

Thus, too, the only way to prove that God exists is through His activities.[6] Perhaps that is even all we can prove:

> . . . When [the soul] strains from the things below toward the knowledge of what lie above, grasping the marvels of His activity, she can for the time being progress no further, but wonders at and reverences Him of whom she knows that He is only through what He effects. She sees the beauty of the skies, the beams of the heav-

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[1] Beat. 6, MG 1. 1268CD.

[2] In d. lum., MG 3. 584D; In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1012, J 6. 337, 15-21.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 960, J 1. 268,25 - 269,4; Beat. 6, MG 1. 1280B; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 732, J 5. 415,19-20; In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1009, J 6. 334,5-9.

[4] De Trin., J 3/1. 14,5-18.

[5] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 960, J 1. 268,25 - 269,2; Beat. 7, MG 1. 1280A.

[6] See, for instance, Or. cat. 12, MG 2. 44C: "καὶ γὰρ τοῦ ὅλως εἶναι θεὸν οὐκ ἄν τις ἑτέραν ἀπόδειξιν ἔχοι τῆς διὰ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν μαρτυρίας." Migne has "διὰ τῆς" in the last line. Since this does not make sense, I have reversed the position of the two words as the simplest correction; the alternative would be to supply something like ἢ τὴν after ἔχοι. Whatever the emendation, the meaning is sufficiently clear.

> enly bodies, the swift circling of the celestial sphere, the orderly and harmonious course of the stars within it; she sees the yearly cycle returning on itself in four seasons, the earth arranged in accord with what envelops it and altering the course of its own activities in correspondence with the variant motion of the bodies above it; she beholds, too, the many forms of nature in living things, some leading their life in the water, others whose lot it is to travel through the air, and still others whose life is on the earth; she is aware of the diverse forms of plants, of the varied herbs differing from one another in their qualities and shapes and virtues, and of the properties of fruits and juices. Looking at these and at other things in which the activity of God is shown forth, the soul mounts in thought by analogy through the wonder of the things that appear to Him of whom she understands, by the works, that He is.
>
> And perhaps in the age to come, when all that is visible passes away according to the word of the Lord, who says that "heaven and earth shall pass away" (Matt. 24:35), and we pass over to that life above eye and ear and mind, then we shall no longer learn to know the nature of the Good in part through His works, as we do now, nor will the Transcendent be understood through His activity in the things that appear; but the form of the unutterable Blessedness will be comprehended wholly otherwise, and other will be the manner of the enjoyment which is not now of such a nature as to "enter into the heart of man" (I Cor. 2:9). But for the present time the limit of ineffable knowledge for the soul is the activity apparent in the things that are, which we understand to be called figuratively "His hand."[1]

The essence of God, however, is prior to all His activities: His activity is dependent on His power, His power on His will, and His will on His nature. And all the names Scripture gives Him express only a part of His activity, by no means the power from which it proceeds and even less the nature which is the source of the power.[2]

3. Through the Image

A more profound source of man's knowledge is in himself, for he is made in the image and likeness of God. The essence (λόγος) of the image consists in this: that everything that belongs to it must also be

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[1] In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1009-12, J 6. 334,16 - 336,12.

[2] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 960, J 1. 269,8-11; Beat. 7, MG 1. 1280AB.

in its archetype.[1] Consequently, to understand himself as image is, for man, to come to some understanding of God. Once, in fact, he so participated that divine Good as to seem another such; his mind was habitually engaged in the "more divine," and he was able to behold the Good with a pure mind, bare of any veiling. The whole task of his present life is to restore that enlightened innocence.[2]

The cognitive powers of contemplation and discernment belong to the image, for we discover them in God. The soul has no need of the passions, and of desire in particular, to come to know God, for the beautiful itself in some way draws to itself whatever regards it. Rather it is only when freed of the passions that the soul is capable of seeing herself as she is: as the image of God. The accurate likeness is found in imitating, in some way, God's transcendent life, doffing the multiple characteristics of her own nature and retaining only love. For God is Love.[3]

Christ was referring to the image of God in man when He declared that the Kingdom of God is within: it is discovered when thought of. This is the lost drachma, the likeness of the King to be sought within our own house. It is not completely lost, but hidden by the filth that covers it.[4] And this is the reference of the assertion previously noted, that the only vehicle for the soul's ascent to the heights is for it to take on the likeness of the descending Dove: our

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[1] In Steph., MG 3. 720C. [2] Beat. 3, MG 1. 1225D-28A.

[3] De an., MG 3. 89B-92A, 93BC; Virg. 11, MG 3. 365-68, J 8/1. 294,19 - 295,13.

[4] Virg. 12, MG 3. 372-73, J 8/1. 300,16 - 301,10; Beat. 6, MG 1. 1269C.

only way to God is through the likeness of purity.[1] The fragrance of the purity of virtues is a substitute for God in us: the archetype of beauty is "analogized" interiorly through the image.[2]

Finally, it is worthy of note that Gregory suggests, although he never develops the proposal, that the full realization of the image, and consequently also of its capability for revealing God to man, is to be found, not in the individual soul, but in the full body of the Church.[3]

4. Through Faith

God in Himself, therefore, transcending all the conditions of creatures and of their knowledge, can be contemplated by faith alone and only by it can He dwell within us.[4] Faith is the only valid medium through which He can be approached; this is stressed in connection with the story of Abraham, who professes himself unable to reveal or interpret the God with whom he has been in contact:

> . . . And so the law of faith arises for the life thereafter, teaching those wending toward God, through the narrative concerning him, that there is no other way of approaching God except when faith mediates, faith by itself joining the seeking soul to the incomprehensible nature. For, abandoning the curiosity of knowledge, "Abraham," it says, "believed God and it was accounted for him unto justice" (Gen. 15:6). "And it was not written for his sake," says the Apostle, ". . . but for ours" (Rom. 4:23), because it is faith, not knowledge, that God accounts for justice unto men. For knowledge has a sort of empirical [or "mercantile"][5] quality, making agreement only with what is known; but not so the faith of Chris-

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[1] Virg. 11, MG 3. 365, J 8/1. 294,11-14; MG 368, J 296,1-9.

[2] In Cant. 3, MG 1. 824, J 6. 89,15 - 91,13.

[3] Ibid., MG 949, J 256-57; cf. Merki, "Ebenbildlichkeit," 472.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 368A, J 1. 136,14-17; In Cant. 3, MG 1. 821, J 6. 87,5-8.

[5] ἐμπειρικήν; ἐμπορικήν is a variant reading.

> tians, for it is the substance, not of things that are known, but of those that are hoped for (Heb. 11:1). But what is possessed is not hoped for: "For what one has," he says, "why should he also hope for?"(Rom. 8:24) But what escapes our perception faith makes ours, guaranteeing by its own firmness what is not apparent.[1]

Faith, therefore, must be unmingled with any idea: we are to believe God's words, not seek the ways and causes of His activities.[2] In fact, the only sure sign of coming to know God is the belief that He is beyond the power of any sign by which He might be recognized.[3] The word of faith is not subtle, but simple and common. It is credible precisely inasmuch as it is beyond belief.[4]

And so in us faith takes the place of reasoning with regard to such matters as are beyond our comprehension.[5] The soul in the Song of Songs discovers after lengthy search and trying experience that what she seeks is higher than all creation and all creaturely means of knowing: by faith alone is her Beloved found and held.[6] The resurrection and elevation to communion with divinity effected in baptism is only the beginning of faith--which, itself, is only a beginning.[7] It is through works and faith that the Word prepares the key to His Kingdom; therefore it is that He draws the soul after Him rather than show her

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 941, J 1. 253,23 - 254,10.

[2] In Res. iii, MG 3. 665A.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 941, J 1. 253,14-17.

[4] Vit. Greg., MG 3. 901C: "ἔστὼς λόγος τῆς πίστεως. . . ὃς ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ὑπὲρ τὴν πίστιν εἶναι τὸ πιστὸν ἔχει."

[5] Ibid., MG 901C.

[6] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 893, J 6. 183,5-10.

[7] In Cant. 8, MG 1. 944, J 6. 249,11 - 250,7.

His face.[1] Faith is the barb by which her heart is wounded with love of Love.[2]

Whence does faith derive? Its source is the activity of God, in the Harmony of the world and particularly in the workings of His providence; it is acquired, too, through the utterances of His saints.[3] Christ especially commanded us to keep in faith the Trinitarian names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as best able to guide us to faith about Him who is: thus they have become for Christians a rule of faith and law of piety.[4]

Despite the necessity of faith, however, and its transcendence of our knowledge, its assertions are yet drastically limited: not even in this way is the totality of divine truth available to us. We believe <u>that</u> God is, rather than what or how He may be.[5] We believe that He is infinite, that all things are from Him, and that all are in His power.[6] But these beliefs and others of the same order mark the limits of the power of faith.

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[1] <u>In Cant.</u> 12, MG 1. 1024, J 6. 253,6-15.

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>, MG 1037, J 370,8-11; 6, MG 893, J 183,5-10.

[3] <u>C. Eun.</u> 2, MG 2. 916A, J 1. 230,26-30; MG 944, J 255,9-14.

[4] <u>C. Eun.</u> 4, MG 2. 469, J 2. 314,11-23.

[5] <u>C. Eun.</u> 2, MG 2. 916A, J 1. 230,26-30; MG 944, J 255,9-14; 3/5, MG 760, J 2. 179,24-27; <u>Vit. Mos.</u>, MG 1. 317AB, D 1. ##46-47.

[6] <u>Hom. op.</u> 23, MG 1. 212B; <u>C. Eun.</u> 2, MG 2. 1069, J 1. 365,13; <u>Non tres dii</u>, MG 2. 129C, J 3/1.52,15-17; <u>Or. cat.</u> 11, MG 2. 44AB.

5. Through Christ

We believe, too, that Christ is "God and Truth, God in truth."[1] He took on flesh and appeared among men

> . . . that men might no longer make their judgments about Him who is on the basis of their own opinions, making dogma out of the suspicions they gleaned from some conjectures; but that, persuaded that God had truly appeared in flesh, we might believe that that alone is the true mystery of piety which is handed on to us through the Word and God Himself, who Himself spoke with the apostles.[2]

So the bride in the Song of Songs initiates (μυσταγωγεῖ) the daughters of Jerusalem into the mysteries with the utterance: "Your mind will not be led to the incomprehensible and infinite until you grasp the Seen (τὸ ὀφθέν) by faith; and the Seen is the nature of the flesh."[3] The faith He set forth, and it alone, preserved to the letter in the Church with utmost reverence, teaches us to understand the enigmatic doctrine of the Law and the Prophets about God.[4]

Knowledge of God, then, comes ultimately through Christ: He is the unique Way. "It is impossible to come to a knowledge of the archetypal Good in any other way than as He appears in the Image of the unseen."[5] He, who is beyond all knowledge or utterance or expression, for love of man became the Image of the unseen God in order that, by modeling ourselves on Him, we might be re-formed to the image of the archetypal Beauty, and thereby become again what we had been in the be-

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[1] [1] *C. Eun.* 2, MG 2. 913, J 1. 230,18-26.

[2] *C. Eun.* 4, MG 2. 468, J 2. 312,13-20.

[3] *In Cant.* 13, MG 1. 1052B, J 6. 387,1-5.

[4] *C. Eun.* 4, MG 2. 468, J 2. 312,20 - 321,9.

[5] *C. Eun.* 1, MG 2. 416, J 1. 180,9-10.

ginning.[1] He is the soul's unique guide, the Way to the Father: contemplation of God's face is the ceaseless advance toward Him accomplished by following behind His Word.[2] Again, it is especially in His Body, the Church, the universe of the new heaven and new earth that He has created, that He is seen and exercises His guidance.[3]

This central role of Christ in Gregory's explanation of how we come to know God is well expressed by Gaith:

> It is in Christ and through Christ that the paradox of human knowledge is resolved. He is both the one who catalyzes and the one who transforms. Through Him the inaccessible truth, essentially inaccessible to the radical impotence of an intelligence enclosed in the categories of space and time, itself presents itself to that intelligence to transform it.[4]

Relationships and Distinction of the "Ways"

These, then, are the means by which man can know what he can know of God. The question spontaneously arises how completely they are distinct from one another. The reader will have noticed in the preceding exposition that for each one of these ways Gregory claims a certain necessity. He says something to the effect of: "Except through this, you cannot know God," referring in turn to His created works, His activities in creation, the image of God in man, faith, and the incarnate Christ. These approaches are reminiscent of the five "ways" of Thomas Aquinas, not merely in being five, but also in this: that it is not

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[1] *De perf.*, MG 3. 269, J 8/1. 194,14 - 195,5. Cf. the passages quoted *supra*, p. 73 and note 2, p. 63 and note 2.

[2] *In Cant.* 12, MG 1. 1025D, J 6. 356,12-16; cf. 5, MG 876, J 158,10 - 159,4; 12, MG 1024-25, J 353,11 - 354,11.

[3] *In Cant.* 13, MG 1. 1045-53, J 6. 380,7 - 390,8.

[4] *La conception . . .*, pp. 154-55.

immediately clear, and is in fact disputed, whether they are really different means of approaching God or are not rather varying specifications of a single means. In this connection it is necessary to recall, too, that Gregory never enumerates these ways of knowing God as such: he refers to them at different times, often enough (as the texts cited in the foregoing sections indicate) with the apparent implication that the way he is speaking of in that context is the unique mode of approach. His doctrine on this matter is not an integral and self-contained whole; there is danger that, unless this be stressed, an exposition such as this, in attempting to isolate and then coordinate its elements, may falsify it by making it appear more systematic than its author intended it to be.

More specifically, consider the distinction between the first two ways: God's works and His activities. Is there any difference at all between them? Is the distinction any other than that between creation considered <u>principiative</u> (activity) and <u>terminative</u> (products)? Gregory's statements permit, I think, no sure answer to the question. The following distinction appears to have some basis, but can be proposed only as a tentative solution: when he speaks of knowing God through His works, He is speaking of created <u>things</u>, while when he speaks of such of the divine activities as "come down to us," he has in mind, not God's creative activity as such, but rather the economy of divine providence as exercised in and for the life of man.

That is, of course, an inadequate distinction. If it is valid, the fifth way here considered, the Incarnation, would be at once an example of a work and of an activity--or, more properly, a whole series

of activities: the entire life of Christ. Further, inasmuch as the Incarnation, under the aspects both of divine work and of divine activity, is evidently completely of the supernatural order, it would be inextricable from the fourth way, that of faith.

The meaning of "faith" in Gregory's writings presents a particular problem which cannot be discussed satisfactorily here. Sometimes it appears to be opposed to knowledge, as in the statements previously introduced that we acquire "faith about Him through His activities, not knowledge of what He is," or that "faith makes known what surpasses our knowledge." On the other hand, it is certainly often considered as a means of knowledge, as when he talks of "contemplating" God through faith. As he makes no precise distinction between the natural and the supernatural orders, so there is no clear consideration of faith as in its essence a supernatural activity; there are, in fact, times when it appears to be used to describe the acceptance of a reasoned conclusion as opposed to knowledge directly derived from experience--a not impossible interpretation, it must be added, of "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). There is always the implication, Platonic as well as Christian in inspiration, that an ascent of the mind from the visible to the invisible has a moral aspect: the soul requires purification for it and consequently, in Christian terms, stands inescapably in need of divine assistance.

Again, knowledge of God through His image in man is not clearly distinct from the other ways. The creation of man in the image and likeness of God is, of course, a divine work, while it is God's activity that makes possible its restoration in sinful nature. Also, inas-

much as the image itself is a supernatural reality, awareness of it would necessarily be dependent on the grace of faith--although it must be admitted that this aspect is nowhere explicitly stated by Gregory.

Clearly, therefore, the resemblance to the "five ways" of St. Thomas is not deep; to distinguish accurately what is reason and what is faith in Gregory is very difficult, and often not possible. After what has been said already about the relationship of philosophy and theology in the Fathers, it should be evident that one cannot expect to find a systematic "natural theology" in a fourth-century thinker. There is, for example, no serious attempt in the writings here considered to demonstrate the existence of God, beyond occasional references to St. Paul's famous indictment of the pagans in the Epistle to the Romans on the grounds that God can be known from the created world, and to the parallel text in the book of Wisdom.[1] Again, this attitude may be partly due to a Socratic-Platonic notion of "dialectical" rather than "eristic" argument, for which there is no sense in proving what is not in dispute.[2] The ideal of composing all the elements of a doctrine in a well-organized system which has a value of its own for intelligence is Aristotelian, not Platonic.

On the other hand, the problems are being considered rationally--to such an extent that it is justly claimed that the Cappadocians, under the stimulus of the Eunomian controversy, so clarified the relationship of God's nature to His attributes and of the latter to one

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[1] Rom. 1:20; Wisd. 13:5. Cf. In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1009, J 6. 335,15; MG 1013, J 339,14-16; MG 1049, J 384,19.

[2] For the distinction, see Plato's Meno, 75cd, and compare the normal practice of Socrates in the dialogues.

another that their doctrine has furnished the foundation for all subsequent scientific treatment of the problem, and that Gregory in particular gives in his writings the best total picture of a "scientific doctrine of God" of his time.[1] Although it is his custom to refer his arguments to supporting Scriptural texts, very rarely are they arguments exclusively from authority and very often not even primarily such; many examples can be adduced of instances where he attempts a rational demonstration of his point.[2]

Finally, it might be objected that nothing has been said yet of what appears to be the principal way of knowing God, and the one most characteristic of Gregory's thought: the mystical knowledge which he calls knowledge through the "dark cloud" (γνόφος) in reference to the obscurity with which Moses was enveloped during his dealings with the Lord on Sinai. The reason for the omission is that such an approach

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[1] See Diekamp, Gotteslehre . . . , pp. 180-81: "Der Kampf gegen die eunomianische Häresie hat die theologischen Erkenntnisse über die Bedeutung unserer Gottesvorstellungen und Gottesnamen in hohem Masse gefördert. Das Verhältniss des göttlichen Wesens zu den Eigenschaften und der letzteren zu einander ist durch die Untersuchungen der drei grossen Kappadocier principiell so klargelegt worden, dass ihre Doctrin die Grundlage für alle spätere wissenschaftliche Behandlung derselben Fragen geworden ist.

"Was der hl. Gregor von Nazianz und der hl. Basilius in dieser Hinsicht für die Theologie geleistet haben, hat der jüngere Gregor in seinen Werken gewissenhaft verwerthet. Er hat ihre Lehren pietätvoll aufgenommen und mit feurigen Eifer vertheidigt; in einzelnen Punkten von untergeordneter Bedeutung berichtigend, zahlreiche Fragen genauer erläuternd und den Gesammtinhalt der Gotteslehrer speculativer erfassend, hat er in seinen Schriften wohl das beste Gesammtbild von dem damaligen Stande der wissenschaftlichen Gotteslehre niedergelegt."

[2] Consider, for instance, such expressions as the following:

C. Eun. 1, MG 1. 308, J 1. 81,16-18: "This accords neither with the divinely inspired words nor with κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι."

Ibid., MG 321, J 94,9-14: "No λόγος has any force unless it is confirmed either by divine words or by human reasonings."

Ibid. 4, MG 557, J 2. 397,14-20: Eunomius proffers this "from no

does not seem to be a distinguishable "way" at all, nor does Gregory ever refer to it as such; rather it is a dimension of which all the others are susceptible, the most profound, to which they all tend. It cannot be satisfactorily discussed without the consideration of the incomprehensibility of God and of the effect of awareness of that aspect of Him on human knowing, which will be the subject of later chapters. There it will be shown that the very impulse to know God exercised in the variety of ways now under discussion must culminate in an apophatic theology which describes a real, though inadequate, knowledge.

Gregory's five ways, therefore, appear to be only inadequately distinct from one another. This is, in fact, the general conclusion of contemporary scholarship dealing with him. The article of Horn which endeavored to demonstrate two ways of knowing God in Gregory, the mirror (that is, the image) and the cloud (the "darkness" of God),[1] has been rejected by Daniélou, Leys, and von Balthasar. The latter, for instance, says:

> The distinctions customarily made between knowledge through creatures (cosmological argument), through introspection of the

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divine word nor from the consequence of likely reasonings, . . . not supported by any Scriptural witness or sequence of reasonings."

De Spir., MG 2. 1304D, J 3/1. 90,27-30: in the divine nature of the Spirit as compared with the divinity of the other two Persons of the Trinity, "we recognize no difference either from the instruction of the Scriptures or from common notions."

Or. cat. 36, MG 2. 92C: it is impossible for one who is not purified to enter the divine chorus, as "both common reason and the teaching of Scripture show."

Cf. Karl Holl, Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältniss zu den grossen Kappadoziern (Tübingen: 1904), p. 200.

[1] G. Horn, "Le miroir et la nuée. Deux manières de voir Dieu d'après saint Grégoire de Nysse," Revue d'ascétique et de mystique, VIII (1927), 113-31.

> soul (knowledge through the image), and through ecstasy (mystical knowledge), are certainly artificial. The former two are two ways of seeing God in the creature (the first in the object, the second in the subject); the third . . . is only a transparence of God through that veil. The proof of this is in the Commentary on the Canticle, in which each step of the mystical ascent which appears to the soul an immediate grasp of God is always revealed as a vision, not of God Himself, but of one of His manifestations (ἐνέργειαι [the word translated throughout this paper by "activity"]).[1]

Lest it seem that the last few paragraphs have rendered useless the discussion of the "ways of knowing" which forms the bulk of this chapter, it may be recalled that the purpose here is to expound Gregory's teaching on how man can approach God in knowing. The important point is not the adequacy with which the different ways are distinguishable from one another, but rather the extent to which each contributes to clarity in understanding the doctrine under consideration. As will be seen more clearly later, it is true that all are ways of specifying the fundamental truth that we have and can have no immediate knowledge of God, and therefore that all our knowledge of Him is, in one way or another, obtained through the creatures in which He variously manifests Himself. The indication, however, of the diverse specifications of this knowledge by means of creation is necessary if the doctrine is to be examined in all the richness of its detail.

Note on Gregory's Use of Analogy

Since knowledge of God must evidently be in some sense "analogous," this chapter can fittingly be concluded with an examination of the meaning of that often ambiguous and puzzling term in Gregory's

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[1] Von Balthasar, Présence . . . , p. 67, n. 4; Daniélou, Platonisme . . . , p. 203, n. 2; Leys, L'image . . . , pp. 17, 33 n.4.

work. Again, since a complete, detailed philological study would take this discussion too far afield, only a general consideration of the meaning it has for him can be offered.

The material for this note is gathered, almost entirely, from the work of Hampus Lyttkens on Aquinas' use of analogy and its historical sources--a work not entirely satisfactory.[1] Although its long first chapter is devoted to "The History of the Analogy Concept,"[2] it makes no claims to completeness; its consideration of that history is oblique inasmuch as its function is exclusively to develop the origins of Thomas' doctrine. A fairly long section of the chapter treats of "Analogy in Post-Aristotelian Greek,"[3] primarily the Neoplatonic use of the concept; although this part is rich in detail and laden with texts from Plotinus, Proclus, and the Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle, and even with a few from Gregory, the latter are not the most important or the most apposite, and on the whole the material is poorly organized. Nevertheless, as Gregory's "atmosphere" is predominantly Neoplatonic, the study can furnish important clues as to the meaning the concept has for him.

Since much of the Neoplatonist enterprise was devoted to a more or less legitimate attempt to "compose" or reconcile the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, the use of analogy by the two ancient philosophers may be considered first. Attention may initially be drawn to the passage in the sixth book of the Republic in which Plato

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[1] The Analogy between God and the World: an investigation of its background and interpretation of its use by Thomas of Aquino (Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1953).

[2] Ibid., pp. 1-110.

[3] Ibid., pp. 58-110.

describes the Good with the aid of the figure of the sun.[1] For, as Lyttkens points out,

> . . . Plato's comparison of the sun to the good is of great historical interest, as it is the basis of the subsequently appearing theory of the analogous knowledge of God. His thoughts of the good as the bringer of products similar to, but not identical with, itself, may likewise have affected the Neoplatonic theory of the similarity of cause and effect.[2]

In this passage, in fact, Plato speaks explicitly of "the sun . . . which the Good begot as an analogue (ἀνάλογον) to itself."[3]

Lyttkens indicates that there is a double use of analogy in Plato, both aspects of which have their influence later, and both differing from Aristotle's use. He makes the basic comparison of the two great philosophers thus:

> . . . Plato . . . speaks of concepts as analogous in the sense that they are part of a proportion to true concepts. What is decisive to Plato is the relation of image to prototype. As according to Plato the image is a mixture of lies and truth, a concept obtained from the image can only express the probable. It will not express the truth, but only something like the truth. It must be noted that in Plato this line of thought primarily refers to knowledge of the sensible world. This is analogous, for true knowledge must emanate from the world of ideas, which contains the prototype of things. From the analogous likeness of the sun to the good, however, Plato draws conclusions from the functions of the former relating to the functions of the latter. This is the beginning of the procedure in which he uses the image in trying to describe the prototype. Applied to the knowledge of God, analogy will then mean that concepts of God drawn from the sensible world can only express a degree of probability. The distinction between the sensible world and the world of ideas also motivates analogy ontologically. As long as it is bound to a body, and accordingly to the sensible world, the human soul cannot understand the purity and truth of the spiritual.
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> Aristotle gives to analogy a somewhat different import. . . . when he designates a concept analogous, this means something else than merely a relation to truth. Instead, it means that the cone

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[1] Republic VI, 506d-509d.

[2] Lyttkens, The Analogy . . . , p. 27.

[3] Republic VI, 508b.

> cept is multivocal, and used of a plurality of things because of their corresponding functions. There is no question of a concept being only in relation to another, true concept; the analogous concept sums up what is common to several. It is superior to the things of which it is said. Applied to the knowledge of God, this would imply an attempt to summarize in general concepts what is common to God and creation. Such concepts must, though multivocal, express something common to God and the world, in the sense that both have properties with corresponding functions, which can be expressed in general concepts.[1]

Plato's normal use, then, is that the image is analogous to the prototype by virtue of which it has what intelligibility it has and through which, in consequence, it is known; in the case of the Good, on the other hand, he proposes knowledge of the prototype through its image on the basis of a similarity in function between them. For Aristotle, however, there is no such relationship of priority. His basic notion of analogy is the biological one of similar function (e.g., the functional similarity of the fin of a fish to the wing of a bird), and so applies with equal propriety in either case. Obviously, too, this is consistent with his view of substantial forms as intrinsic to things and in no way transcending them.

The outstanding feature of the Neoplatonic use of analogy is that it is ontological rather than logical: in other words, reality itself is analogical. This use of the concept is fundamentally in terms of the relationship of an effect to its extrinsic cause (whether its producer, its exemplar, or its end), rather than the logical notion of similarity of relations among things. The basic Neoplatonic view of reality is that of the unity of all being, and that conceived as a unity of source. All being derives from a fundamental principle.

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[1] Lyttkens, The Analogy . . . , pp. 51-52 (emphasis added).

This it necessarily imitates, but always deficiently; the effect is necessarily inferior to its cause, and consequently the chain of causality gives rise to a graded hierarchy of being. The name always belongs primarily to the cause of whatever property is in question, since it has the property by its own nature; its application to the effects that receive the property can only be secondary.

This derivation of all being by descent from its ultimate source is explained and understood by the Platonic concept of participation. It is here that the proportional notion of analogy comes into play, for each effect receives of the archetypal perfection "as much as it is capable of." The basic principle employed here by the Neoplatonists is: "All (perfections are) in all (beings), but in each in its own way."[1] The proportion in which the perfection is received is determined either by the nature of the being or, in the case of rational beings, also by their merit. In consequence of this principle, for example, the soul receives the concepts of material things immaterially, but can know the One only "piecemeal" (μεριστικῶς).

Although the effect is always inferior to its cause, the descent of beings from their source is yet basically continuous: the gaps in reality between the effects and their proximate causes are the smallest possible, so that the effect can be considered more like its cause than unlike. The analogy between cause and effect is, in fact, not merely in terms of likeness, for it also involves "contact" (συναφή).

The unity of being, furthermore, is one of process, and therefore dynamic. The effect remains in its cause to the extent that, by

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[1] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν· οἰκείως δὲ ἐν ἑκάστῳ.

participation, it is like it; inasmuch as it is unlike, it proceeds from the cause (descent), and it returns to it (conversion) by becoming like it again and so seeking once more to become identical with it. This return constitutes its goodness, and so its likeness to God. The manner of the return corresponds to the ontological status of the effect: it can be converted by its mere existence, or by its life, or through knowledge.

In its application to knowledge, the Neoplatonic conception of analogy has two closely allied functions: the transfer of a concept from one sphere of reality to another, or (what really seems to be a special case of the former) knowledge of God. In general, there are two different directions possible for knowledge by analogy (both found, for instance, in Plotinus), corresponding fairly closely to Plato's usage. It can proceed downward from Ideas to sensible things which are their images. In this case the name, like the being itself, comes from the primary being to which it properly, or more properly, applies; thus, since the being of the sensible is not the same as that of its Form, the name applied to it does not have the same meaning either. But when knowledge of the transcendent is in question, since that cannot be known immediately, analogous knowledge must go in the opposite, "upward" direction; then it is always an inadequate approximation. Since this is the way of return of the knower to its source and thus constitutive of its goodness, purification of the soul is necessary for this kind of ascent.

How much of this doctrine, then, is useful in interpreting Gregory's use of the notion of analogy? A great deal, surely. Völker,

for instance, has stressed the overall unity of his world, in which every being is the "sum" of all those lower than it and an imitation of what is higher, and has stated that this ontological union through participation and imitation is the foundation of his use of analogy.[1] His basic metaphysical scheme can be said to be Neoplatonic; it is interesting to note how frequently he uses the concept of participation, particularly in contexts where there is question of the Platonic notions of the Good and the Beautiful, and where he is speaking of the image in man and the ascent of the soul to God. His notion of analogy can be said to be basically ontological to the extent that the analogy is primarily in reality, grounded in participation, and only derivatively in knowledge. And of course its fundamental application in the latter sphere is that to knowledge of God, which is considered as the return of the rational creature to union with its source.

Some differences, however, must be noted. The Neoplatonic view of the continuity of being is altered, though not destroyed, by the insurpassable ontological "gap" between the totality of creation and its Creator. Although the creature is in some sense like God and has every measure of reality that it has through participation in Him, and even though the likeness involves a degree of contact with God, nevertheless the gulf between them is measureless. The gnostic tendency to bridge that gulf by a countless series of hypostatized intermediaries between the transcendent and the material, not unknown to Neoplatonism and by no means ignored by the Arians, is to Gregory

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[1] Völker, "Die Ontologie . . . ," pp. 9-16; Gregor . . . , p. 29.

simply anathema. Even the principle of the necessary inferiority of effect with regard to its cause, it may be noticed in passing, is not universally true: he follows the Eastern practice, almost entirely repudiated by the West, of referring to the Father in his theology of the Trinity as the cause of the Son, while at the same time strenuously opposing the Arian doctrine that the second Person must thereby be inferior to the first.[1]

Finally, there is one peculiarity of Gregory's use of analogy which is not at all illuminated by Lyttkens' study: this is his preference for the verb "ἀναλογίζεσθαι" over the nominal, adjectival or adverbial forms otherwise common. Although its meaning is fairly clear, it can only be translated by such a periphrasis as "to reason by analogy," for instance when he asserts that from the effect we can "analogize" the Creator. The full meaning is that we can know Him by an "ascending" analogy which is due to a limited participation of Him by the creature.

Very summarily, then: analogy seems to mean for Gregory first a relationship of effect to (creative) cause, an ontological relationship of participation due to which the effect somehow "reflects" (and, by implication, tends toward) its cause. Secondarily, it is the means by which some inadequate and partial knowledge of the cause may be had from the experienced effect, by an ascent from the imperfect to the perfect, an ascent which both requires and contributes to the moral

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[1] Paul Henry, S.J., in an (as far as I know) unpublished lecture on the notion of creation in Plotinus, has suggested that the Arian insistence that the Son must be inferior to the Father im strongly influenced by just this Neoplatonic tenet. This seems quite probable.

perfection of the knower.

This completes the discussion of the means Gregory finds at man's disposal in his quest for knowledge of God. The logical next step is to consider the use that actually can be made of these means, by analyzing the knowledge we acquire through them; that will constitute the scope of the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT MAN KNOWS OF GOD

The aim of the present chapter is to examine the content of human knowledge of God, His nature and characteristics (prescinding, however, from matters exclusively concerned with the relations of the Persons of the Trinity with one another); the topic of the next chapter will be the limitations to which such knowledge is subject. It is important to note (and demonstrated by the footnotes) that this doctrine is nowhere presented by Gregory as a whole: his treatment of what is gathered here is normally incidental rather than thematic. Although he does make logical connections among the various divine attributes, which will be pointed out, they do not necessarily impose the order employed here; the latter is, consequently, to a certain extent arbitrary. The difficulty is, as a matter of fact, that he establishes too many connections, too many mutual implications among the various aspects of the divine nature, for any systematic view of their relations to emerge. Nor is this an accident: for the circular interrelationships of the divine attributes that come within the range of our discernment is an indication of God's absolute oneness.

Nor can it be claimed that the material presented here covers every detail of Gregory's doctrine: he is too diffuse, casual, and in some instances ambiguous, for that to be possible. What is important is that his approach, his own idea of the extent of our knowledge of

God, become clear; the fairly thorough consideration presented here is sufficient for that purpose. One result of this preoccupation is that statements seen in the previous chapters are often repeated here; this is necessary in order to indicate the network of relationships to which our author refers. The only alternative would be to renounce any order at all in the presentation.

Gregory's teaching concerning the knowledge of God actually possessed within the Church, and presumably acquired by the ways on which the attention of the previous chapter has been focused, can be expressed in a series of simple statements; these will form the headings of the sections of the present chapter.

"God is Being"

What, then, do we know of God? We certainly know, first of all, that He exists: His works, as Scripture tells us, declare that, although His essence remains inexpressible and beyond our mind's comprehension.[1] He is

> . . . God and truth, that is, God in truth, who always is just what He is understood [to be] and named, neither at any time not being nor ever not to be, whose existence, whatever it be essentially, escapes every approach and busy effort at comprehension. But for us, as the word of Wisdom somewhere says, "from the greatness and beauty of His creations we come, by some analogy of the things we know, to a knowledge of His existence" (Wisd. 13:5): He favors us only with faith through His activities, not with knowledge of what He is.[2]

In fact, Being is His special characteristic:

> The proper token of divinity is to exist truly.[3]

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[1] *In Cant.* 11, MG 1. 1009, J 334,15 - 336,1.

[2] *C. Eun.* 2, MG 2. 913D-16A, J 1. 230,22-30.

[3] *C. Eun.* 3/8, MG 2. 840D, J 2. 251,1-2.

> The account of Holy Scripture reveals one token of genuine divinity, which Moses was taught by the voice from above when he heard Him say: "I am who Am." This alone, therefore, we think we should believe to be genuinely divine which is grasped as eternally and infinitely in existence, and all that is beheld about it is ever the same, neither added to nor withdrawn.[1]
>
> . . . Moses legislates for us, as a characteristic of the genuine divinity, to know nothing else about God than this alone: that He is (for that is what "I am who Am" indicates).[2]

But Gregory is emphatic with regard to the meaning he gives this name; asserting against Eunomius that the Word is referred to by it as well as by the name "Angel" in Exodus, he asserts:

> . . . [He is] called "Angel" as revealer of the Father, and "He who Is" as not having any name characteristic of His essence, but transcending every meaning of a name.[3]

Something of the meaning of God's being and of the difficulty we have in understanding it can be seen in Gregory's reflection on Moses' encounter with the Lord in the fiery bush:

> . . . A man could spend a long time devoted in leisure to the lofty cares of philosophy and still barely come to know what being, which has existence by its own nature, really is, and what not-being, which has existence only in seeming and is, of its own nature, insubsistent.
>
> And this is what the great Moses seems to me to have known then, instructed in the theophany: that nothing of all the things we comprehend by sense or mentally behold really subsists except the transcendent essence and cause of all, from which the All is suspended. For even if the mind regard any other among beings, reason beholds in no other being that absence of need of another by which it is capable of existing without participating being. But that which is ever the same, the ungrowing, undiminishing, that which is equally motionless with regard to any alteration, with respect to either better or worse (for it is stranger than what is worse and has no better), without need of any other, alone desirable, both participated by every being and not lessened by

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[1] C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 768D-69A, J 2. 186,9-15.

[2] Ibid., MG 772A, J 188,11-14.

[3] C. Eun. 3/9, MG 2. 873A, J 2. 279,18-20; and see the discussion of God's ineffability, Chapter VII infra.

> the participation of those who participate: this is truly the really Real (τὸ ὄντως ὄν), and perception of this in knowledge of the truth.[1]

For truth, as he has explained in the lines immediately preceding this text, is "the sure apprehension of the really Real" and realization that not-being is not that.

God's being, as has been seen already, is utterly removed from any comparison or anything in common (κοινωνία) with that of creatures, since their being is characterized by interval while His is not. His being alone is eternal and infinite. What eternity means, in fact, is "being always in existence."[2]

"This, then, is that Being in whom, as the Apostle says, all things subsist and each of us who participate being live and move and have our being" (Col. 1:17; Acts 17:28).[3] Truly Being Himself, He has given and gives the things that are the power to come to be and to remain in existence: "all things are held fast in existence by the power of the really Real."[4] His creative will brings creatures from not-being to being; He alone can make not-being subsist and add qualities at His pleasure to what is.[5] His power and nature are in all things to keep them in existence.[6]

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[1] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 333A-C, D 2. ##22-25.

[2] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 456, J 1. 217,26-29.

[3] Ibid., MG 368, J 137,1-3.

[4] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 724D-25A, J 5. 406,6-7; cf. C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 333, J 1. 106,2-6; Beat. 3, MG 1. 1225BC; In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1009, J 6. 334,2-5.

[5] Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184; 23, MG 212B.

[6] De an., MG 3. 44AB.

To deny that God exists, as the fool does (Ps. 52:1-2), is truly a fatal error:

> For falling away from the really Real is very truly a decay and dissolution of what is compact. For how could one be in existence (ἐν τῷ εἶναι) and not be in Being (ἐν τῷ ὄντι)? And how could he remain in being, without believing Being, that He is? But He who truly is is certainly God, as the vision of the theophany testifies to the great Moses. So he who casts out of his thought the existence of God, by saying that He does not exist, destroys his own existence, getting outside of Being.[1]

"God is the Good"

In language strongly reminiscent of Plato and Plotinus, Gregory constantly refers to God as, not only good, but the Good. That He is this is immediately evident from His being: the really Real is either goodness itself (αὐτοαγαθότης) or whatever higher name one might conceive to express the ineffable nature. It is the nature of the good that is, properly, being. For evil is not anything, but is only the non-being of good; its coming to be is only the privation of being, so that, to put it paradoxically, it has its being in non-being.[2]

This, in fact, is simply what we mean by God: His perfection in every aspect of the good. "The divine is not one good only, but every conceivable good: powerful, just, good, wise--whatever names or

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[1] *In Ps.* 2.13, MG 1. 565, J 5. 137,4-11.

[2] *De an.*, MG 3. 93B; *In Eccl.* 7, MG 1. 725, J 5. 406,7 - 407,5. Völker, in "Zur Gotteslehre Gregors von Nyssa," *Vigiliae Christianae*, IX (1955), 104, n. 1, comments significantly on the former passage: "Das höchste Gut ist also das im wahrsten Sinne Existierende, d.h. Gregor kombiniert ethische mit ontologischen Aussagen, wie er es bei Plato gelernt hat."

concepts have meanings befitting God."[1] Whatever name we excogitate to express the inexpressible, what it means must be wholly good.[2] Again, in the same way, He is all-perfect ἀρετή."[3]

Gregory evidently struggles for adequate language to express God's goodness: although he calls Him the first Good, the really real Good, the only one properly called good,[4] he frequently tends to go further, as in the following expressions:

> . . . that beauty which is beheld about the first Good and what is beyond all good (τὸ ἐπέκεινα παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ).[5]
>
> . . . the only-begotten God is the Good by nature, or rather beyond every good.[6]
>
> . . . the genuinely Good, or what is beyond the good.[7]
>
> . . . [Paul called] "glory" and "substance" that which transcends every good (τὸ ὑπερκείμενον παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ),[8] which can be worthily neither understood nor uttered.

But, tantalizingly, he never states more clearly what he means by these frequently repeated expressions.

True goods are those that are good at all times, for all, and in every way: these are found nowhere else than in the divine nature.[9]

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[1] Nat. Chr., MG 3. 1149A; cf. C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 356, J 1. 126, 8-11; De Spir., MG 2. 1304D-05A, J 3/1. 91,4-12.

[2] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 725, J 5. 406,10-13.

[3] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301A, D 1. #7.

[4] Virg. 11, MG 3. 368D, J 8/1. 297,6-7; In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 624C, J 5. 285,11; De an., MG 3. 93A.

[5] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361A, J 8/1. 289,25-26.

[6] C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 776, J 2. 192,11-12.

[7] In Ps. 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 26,12.

[8] De perf., J 8/1. 188,14.

[9] In Eccl. 8, MG 1. 737B, J 5. 421,19 - 422,4.

As the perfection and fullness of good, God is self-sufficient, and in need of nothing considered good.[1]

> . . . For we have learned that the divine is ever full of all good, or rather that itself is the fullness of goods always; it requires no addition for perfection, but itself by its own nature is the perfection of good. But the perfect is equally foreign to increase and lessening, and on account of this we say that the perfection of goods beheld in the divine nature is always the same, since we grasp it as such, toward whatever aspect we strain forth our thoughts. And so the divine is never empty of good.[2]

There is no distinction, in Him, of will and its fulfillment: to will, for God, is to possess. He wills what He has and has what He wills.[3]

God's goodness, therefore, is not in any way acquired: He is good by nature, by His essence; He alone is by nature desirable.[4] In fact, such names as "good" (in contrast, v.g., to "begotten") are naturally fitting for the transcendent nature alone.[5] Again and again Gregory finds it necessary to hammer this truth home against Eunomius and his followers:

> . . . The uncreated nature . . . does not have an acquired good nor does it receive the beautiful in itself by participation of some beauty that transcends it; it is what the good itself is by nature, and is understood as good, and even our opponents testify that it is the simple, unique, and uncomposed fount of goods.[6]

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[1] De an., MG 3. 92C; C. Eun. 3/7, MG 2. 808, J 2. 222,2-6.

[2] C. Eun. 3/7, MG 2. 808, J 2. 221,22-23, 222,2-6.

[3] De an., MG 3. 93BC; C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 776, J 2. 192,1-7.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 321, J 1. 95,12-23; In Ps. 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 26,12-13. Cf. also: Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184A; C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 776, J 2. 192,11-12 (the Son); Or. Dom. 1, MG 1. 1140C; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301A, D 1. #7.

[5] C. Eun. 3/5, MG 2. 756, J 2. 175,27 - 176,2; cf. Or. Dom. 1, MG 1. 1140B; In Ps. 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 26,4-8; In Eccl. 8, MG 1. 737, J 5. 422,1-4.

[6] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 336, J 1. 107,4-10.

Thus there can be no difference of "more and less" in the divine good:

> . . . for a being is in no way deficient in wisdom or power or any other good if its good is not acquired, but it is good by nature simply inasmuch as it is. So that one who claims to comprehend the essences of "more and less" in the divine nature deceives himself in making the divine composed of unlike elements, understanding the subject as one thing and the participated reality, by participation of which what is not good becomes such, something else.[1]

So God's good cannot grow, for there is no other it can participate to improve; nor can it lessen, as He cannot admit evil.[2] It must, then, be infinite (his proof is offered below, under God's infinity).

God is the truly simple and immaterial good: only because they participate it do men share the name. He ever draws them to Himself.[3] Though He transcends all our ideas of "good,"[4] whatever we can learn of Him is beyond price--"for knowledge of this Good is possession."[5]

God created man only because He is good; and therefore

> . . . He would not indicate the power of His goodness half perfectly, giving him something of what belonged to Himself but begrudging the participation of something else: the perfect form of His goodness consists in bringing man into being from not-being and in perfecting him so that he lacks no goods. And since the list of the particular goods is long, it cannot easily be enumerated; therefore the account sums them all up in a comprehensive expression by declaring that man came into being "according to the image of God." For this is equivalent to saying

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 321, J 1. 95,12-20; cf. MG 356, J 126,11-13.

[2] C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 472, J 2. 316,21-23; In Cant. 5, MG 1. 873D, J 6. 158,8-11; cf. In Ps. 2.4, MG 1. 500A, J 5. 79,10-12.

[3] De an., MG 3. 93C; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 333, J 1. 106,16-19; MG 336, J 107,7-10; MG 340, J 112,7-14; MG 441-44, J 204,29 - 206,6; 3/10, MG 907, J 2. 308,21 - 309,6; Or. cat. 1, MG 2. 13AB; cf. Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197AB; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 725A, J 5. 406,7-16; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 885D, J 6. 174,5-13.

[4] De an., MG 3. 92C; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729, J 5. 412,15-17; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 37,3 - 38,2.

[5] In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 624C, J 5. 285,11-12.

> that He made human nature a participant of every good. For if God is the fullness of goods and man His image, then the image possesses its likeness to its archetype in being full of every good.[1]

And yet, since the divine good is infinite, there is no limit to the soul's advance in participation of it: it always grows greater as a result of participating, but without exhausting the Good, which remains always equally (sc. infinitely) far above it.[2] From this point of view, God is truly and properly beatitude, for this is the summit and the limit of any conception of good. Man, then, becomes blessed by participation to the extent that he becomes like God.[3]

This section may be concluded with a passage, Platonic in tone but giving Gregory's rhetoric full scope, in which he presents Solomon describing his search for the good (on Eccles. 2:2-3):

> "This was my special pursuit of knowledge: to waste my life in nothing vain, but to find that good by which, when one chances on it, he does not fail to distinguish what is valuable; which is sufficient and not fleeting, coextensive with the whole of life; which is equally good for every age, the first, the middle, and the last, and for all the number of his days.
>
> "For until I see," he says, "what kind of good it is for the sons of men, that they practice beneath the sun for the number of the days of their life." For the pursuits of the flesh, no matter how much they delight the senses for the present, give joy only for the moment: it is impossible to get adequate pleasure from anything that happens in the body, for the pleasure of drinking ends in satiety and fullness likewise extinguishes the desire for eating, and in the same way any other desire is quenched by partaking of what is desired; and if it rise again, again it withers. And none of the joys of sense suffices or is constant forever.
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> And again, in addition to this, there is one good for youth and another for full manhood, a different one for one past the

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[1] *Hom. op.* 16, MG 1. 184AB; much the same development is found in *Or. cat.* 5, MG 2. 21B-24A.

[2] This will be treated more fully in Chapter VIII *infra*; references will be given there.

[3] *In Ps.* 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 25,11 - 26,19; cf. *Beat.* 1, MG 1. 1197AB.

flower, another for late middle age, and still another for the old man already crawling into the earth.

"But I," he says, "was seeking that good which is equally good for every age and every stage of life, of which one hopes for no satiety and finds no fullness, but the desire of it ever accompanies participation, and yearning endures along with the enjoyment, and it is not circumscribed by the attainment of the object of desire. The more one exults in such a good, the more desire flames up along with the delight and delight strains forward with desire, and in every period of life it is ever fair to those who pursue it, never altered with the restlessness of times and ages. Whether his eyes be open or shut, whether he rejoice or grieve, at night or in daytime, on land or on sea, working or resting, ruling or serving, in a word, in every facet of life it is equally good, becoming neither worse nor better as a result of the circumstances that befall him, neither lessening nor increasing."

This is, by my account at least, the really real good that Solomon sought to see, which men practice beneath the sun for the whole number of the days of their life. And this seems to me to be no other than the work of faith, the activity common to all, available in equal degree to all who wish it, and abiding throughout life in all power and sufficiency. This is the good work; and may it come to us also in Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom is glory forever. Amen.[1]

"God is the Beautiful"[2]

The God who is the Good is also the Beautiful, for true goods both are beautiful themselves and make beautiful those who participate

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[1] In Eccl. 2, MG 1. 648-49, J 5. 313,4 - 314,10.

[2] "The beautiful," again, is the traditional but very deficient translation for τὸ καλόν. The Greek word has a much wider range of application than the English; the French "beau" comes much closer to equaling it in scope. In various contexts, its meaning can be rendered by such words as "fine," "noble," "admirable," "excellent"--or even "good." It is something of a strain for "beautiful" to be applied, in English, to an immaterial reality; that is a secondary, if not strictly improper, use of the word. The Greek word, on the other hand, can refer equally well to a spiritual or moral reality, and in Plato and the tradition deriving from him this is probably its primary and more normal use.

Inasmuch as the word is applied to God, it would probably be more aptly translated by "admirable"; the rendition "beautiful" is retained here because, for one reading in English who is familiar with the Platonic tradition, it will immediately suggest the word it translates, with all the latter's moral and philosophical connotations.

them.[1] Here again the source in Plato of Gregory's thought, as well as of his language, is evident, for it is the former who first makes this identification.[2]

God is beautiful by nature, the proper and first Beautiful:

> He does not possess His being beautiful from another source, nor is so for a time nor in relation to something, but is beautiful of and through and in Himself, always beautiful, and not becoming so now and not to be beautiful later, but at every instant the same, beyond increase and growth and foreign to any change or alteration.[3]

Consequently He is His beauty, by identity; He does not receive it by participation.[4] Again, the divine beauty must be infinite, but it will be more appropriate to present the argument for this in connection with the discussion of the infinity of God.

The divine beauty, like the good, is simple, incorporeal,

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[1] In Eccl. 8, MG 1. 737, J 5. 422, 12-13; cf. Virg. 10, MG 3. 361, J 8/1. 289,15-17, 25-26; 11, MG 368, J 296,23-24; De an., MG 3. 93A; C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 469, J 2. 315,25-26; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197A; De mortuis, MG 3. 500A.

[2] See, e.g., Plato, Symposium, 211b, 212a. Often, although not always, in Plato the two seem nearly synonymous; Gregory probably carries the process of identification even further. Note, for example, how closely the statements in the present section parallel those in the previous one, and how often, in the passages cited, he slips back and forth from the good to the beautiful and vice versa.

The Platonic inspiration goes deeper, of course, than the simple assimilation in the meaning of the two words. For further indications of it, remark in what follows the typically Platonic emphasis on the superiority of the intelligible over the sensible and on an ascent from the latter to the beautiful, and the frequent reference already indicated to participation in this context; compare, too, the passage quoted on this page (note 3) with Symposium, 211ab. Finally, the context of the reference to the "one vehicle for the soul's ascent to the heights" (see the final paragraph of the present section) may be connected in Gregory's mind with the chariot of the Phaedrus.

[3] Virg. 11, MG 3. 368, J 8/1. 296,15-23, 297,6-7; De an., MG 3, 64C-65A; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 404C, D 2. #237.

[4] De an., MG 3. 92C-93A; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 336, J 1. 107,6-7.

immaterial, unfigured: it is in many ways opposed to sensible beauty, which it transcends, and consequently exceedingly difficult for men to distinguish when the senses of their souls have not been exercised in prescinding from the material.[1] For it completely transcends all our experience:

> Proper words to indicate that Beauty we have not learned: there is no example of that we seek in things, nor, indeed, can it be manifested by any comparison. For who will compare the sun to a tiny spark, or oppose a little drop to the boundless deeps? For as the small droplet is to the depths or the little spark in proportion to the mighty sunbeam, so are all that men marvel at as beautiful in comparison with that beauty connected with what is the first Good and beyond all good.[2]

Not surprisingly, then, it is hard for us to reach, for our nature is "beggar of beauty" and frequently errs in judgments about it.[3] But this ultimate Beauty is, in fact, beyond all human ability to comprehend or to express.[4]

The "characters" of the divine Beauty--as stamped on its image--are purity, blessedness, freedom from passion, estrangement from any evil, and all such qualities, as well as reason and understanding and love.[5] So it is "the only worthy (object) of desire":[6] participation of it is wholly desirable for those who know it, for by its nat-

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[1] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361B-D, J 8/1. 290,1 - 291,4; 11, MG 364BC, J 293,3 - 293,11; cf. Vit. Mos., MG 1. 401D, D 2. #231.

[2] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361A, J 8/1. 289,16-26; cf. In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 38,22 - 39,1.

[3] De an., MG 3. 92C.

[4] Virg. 10, MG 3. 360-61, J 8/1. 288-91, passim.

[5] Hom. op. 5, MG 1. 137BC.

[6] Virg. 11, MG 3. 365D, J 8/1. 294,23; cf. Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197A.

ure it draws to itself whoever regards it.[1] "Who can fail to be a lover of such Beauty if only he has an eye capable of gazing intently on its bloom?"[2] And since the beautiful is wholly lovable to one who knows it, and since God, in His identity with it, knows it as no other can, His knowledge becomes love. And so God is Love, eternally, dynamically, since true beauty never admits of satiety.[3]

As the only being beautiful by His own nature, God is the cause of all else that is beautiful and good.[4] It is only by participation of His beauty that creatures are, and are called, beautiful, and to be near the divine beauty is to participate it.[5] So it is the archetype to which man is made like: "in all respects the prototype of beauty is stamped in its own characteristics on its image."[6] It is through this image that we can acquire some analogical knowledge (ἀναλογίσασθαι) of the archetypal Beauty.[7]

There is only one way in which the soul can be united with this Beauty:

> The soul cannot otherwise be in contact with the incorruptible God than if she become as pure as she can through incorruption in

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[1] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301A, D 1. #7; MG 401A, D 2. #225; De an., MG 3. 89B.

[2] In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 38,5-6.

[3] De an., MG 3. 96C, 97A.

[4] Virg. 11, MG 3. 368D, J 8/1. 296,23-24; cf. C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 469D, J 2. 315,25-26.

[5] Virg. 11, MG 3. 364C, J 8/1. 292,14-15; MG 368D, J 294,22-24; cf. C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 797A, J 2. 212,7-8.

[6] In Steph., MG 3. 720C; Hom. op. 5, MG 1. 137A; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197B.

[7] In Cant. 3, MG 1. 824, J 6. 91,3-4.

> order that she may grasp like by like, subjecting herself as a mirror to the purity of God so that the beauty in her is formed by participation and reflection of the prototype of beauty.[1]

To be thus purified of evil is to be completely in the beautiful; the soul thus freed is joined to it as to her own.[2] When thus purified, too, the soul can transcend material beauty, using what the senses reveal as a step for the ascent, allowing the beauty in such things to lead her by the hand to the desire of that all-surpassing Beauty of which the whole creation announces the knowledge (γνῶσις); the great model for this ascent is Abraham.[3] It is by her own reasonings, not any coercion, that the soul is impelled toward the beautiful.[4] And as none can grasp the brilliance of light merely by hearing of it, so she needs her own eyes to behold the beauty of the intelligible and true light.[5]

Hope ought to lead us there, but is often misled by an idol of beauty.[6] The deceptions in regard to the beautiful caused in us by desire are the effects of sin, so that the true beauty is obscured by our errors.[7] Failure to attain possession of it is a loss as far beyond the power of words to express as it itself is ineffable, while one who has, by some divine gift and inspiration, seen it keeps the

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[1] Virg. 11, MG 3. 368, J 8/1. 296,3-9.

[2] De an., MG 3. 89B.

[3] Virg. 11, MG 3. 364-65, J 8/1. 291,15 - 294,6; C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 940, J 1. 252,27 - 253,1.

[4] In Cant. 5, MG 1. 876D, J 6. 160,15-17.

[5] Virg. 10, MG 3. 360D, J 8/1. 289,8-11.

[6] De an., MG 3, 92AB.

[7] Ibid., MG 64C.

excitement, without attempting to explain it, in the deep recesses of consciousness.[1]

The only chariot for the ascent of the soul, as has been seen, is that it take on the likeness of the divine Dove, becoming beautiful by its beauty, light by participation of light, so as to grasp what it has become like, participating and reflecting the Beautiful itself.[2] The disposition of the soul caught by this Beauty is that of a lover (ἔρως): the ardent lover takes the beauty he can see as merely an image of what he desires and yearns to enjoy Beauty face to face.[3] Such love demands strength, and so neither the very young nor the very old in spirit can fulfill the first great commandment of the Law in their desire of the divine Beauty.[4] And this love knows no satiety, for there is ever more for the eager soul to discover in the boundless Beauty.[5] Perhaps, in fact, human perfection even consists in having ever more of the Beautiful.[6]

"God is Infinite"

For God, as the Being and the Good and the Beautiful, is absolutely infinite:

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[1] Virg. 10, MG 3. 360C, J 8/1. 288,18-26; MG 361A, J 289,11-17.

[2] Virg. 11, MG 3. 365, J 8/1. 294,12-15; In Cant. 5, MG 1. 876, J 6. 159,2-4.

[3] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 401D, D 2. ##231-32.

[4] In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 38,11-23.

[5] In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1000, J 6. 321,16-22; 12, MG 1036A, J 6. 366,11-20.

[6] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301C, D 1. #10.

> For the Prophet cries out that the divine greatness has no limit, expressly proclaiming that "of the magnificence of the glory of His holiness there is no bound" (Ps. 144:3-5). But if His attributes are boundless, much more He Himself in His essence, whatever He is, cannot be embraced by any limit in any part.[1]

This is His proper characteristic, which distinguishes Him from all the marks of created things:

> The divine nature is bounded in no part: surpassing by its infinity every boundary in every direction, it is far from the characteristics to be found in creation. For the power without interval or quantity or circumscription, holding in itself the ages and all the creation in them, and in every aspect spilling out beyond the boundlessness of the ages by the eternity of its own nature, either has no characteristic disclosing its nature, or one that is completely other and not that which belongs to creation.[2]

> The blessed and eternal nature that transcends every understanding, encompassing all things in itself, is enclosed by no limit. For nothing is contemplated aboutiit: not time, nor place, nor color, nor shape, nor form, nor bulk, nor quality, nor interval, nor any other circumscribing name or reality or concept; but all the good understood about it proceeds to boundlessness and infinity.[3]

Consequently, nothing is infinite to God, since He embraces all within Himself.[4] His infinity with respect to time is eternity.[5]

As a reading of the texts just quoted indicates, this infinity of God is positive and essential: it is His very being or nature that has no limit. He stresses this clearly when, commenting on the text of the Psalm in the first passage above, he uses the infinity of the divine attributes as the basis of an *a fortiori* argument for the infinity of God's essence. Gregory, as will be seen more clearly in

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[1] *C. Eun.* 3/1, MG 2. 601, J 2. 38,21-26.

[2] *C. Eun.* 3/6, MG 2. 796A, J 2. 210,9-17.

[3] *In Cant.* 5, MG 1. 873, J 6. 157,14-21; cf. *Beat.* 3, MG 1225B.

[4] *In Res. iii*, MG 3. 668B.

[5] *C. Eun.* 1, MG 2. 364-68, J 1. 133,27 - 136,27; MG 456-57, J 217,26 - 219,7.

the following pages, marks an important stage in the history of Christian awareness of the significance of God's infinity.[1]

He states, without further argument, that the divine infinity follows from the fact that God is intelligible and immaterial; in fact, he avers with admirable consistency, even spiritual creatures have a kind of infinity (that conclusion should be noticed: it will be of essential importance in Chapter VIII). Again, God can have no beginning or end, since His life is not participated from a source other than Himself.[3]

The one argument which Gregory does elaborate to show that God is necessarily infinite is founded on the "formalities" of the Good and the Beautiful. Early in the work against Eunomius, for instance, he states the general principle on which the argumentation will rest:

> For all goods, as long as they continue not accepting their opposites, have no limit of their goodness since they can naturally be circumscribed only by their opposites, as can be seen in particular examples: strength stops where weakness embraces it, life is bounded by death, darkness arises as the boundary of light, and to express all summarily, particular goods come to an end in their opposites. . . . But if the divine and unalterable nature cannot receive the worse in itself--and this is admitted by our enemies themselves--it must be regarded as completely infinite in good.[4]

A few pages later he summarizes the principle more explicitly: "For, as we have said previously also, it is only by the presence of evil

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[1] This question has been discussed in detail and fully documented by James E. Hennessy, S.J., "The Background, Sources, and Meaning of Divine Infinity in Saint Gregory of Nyssa" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Philosophy, Fordham University, 1963); many more texts are adduced there.

[2] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 885, J 6. 173,11 - 174,1.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 933, J 1.,246,22-30.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 303, J 1. 77,7-20.

that goods are diminished. In realities whose nature does not admit the worse, there is no conceivable limit of goodness."[1] And it recurs--although in another context: applied now not to God, but to moral perfection--a number of years later in the life of Moses:

> Every good has by its own nature no limit, but is limited by the juxtaposition of its opposite, as life by death and light by darkness: in general, every good comes to a halt at all that we understand in opposition to good.[2]

The basic idea involved in such a principle is well worth noting, as it is a constant in Gregory's metaphysics: that perfection of any kind can be limited only by the presence of its opposite; it may be regarded as an early formulation of the principle that "actus est de se illimitatus." In this connection he points out clearly, though only once and with frustrating brevity, that infinity is not a relative notion: "The infinite is not such by its relation to anything else, but by itself, understood in terms of itself alone, escapes limit."[3]

Finally, the dynamic character of the expression also deserves attention, even if no conclusion may immediately be drawn from it: the above texts have referred to the good "coming to a halt" at its opposite; the last one cited refers to it as "escaping" limit. And again, when it is not bounded by its opposite, "the good will advance (προελεύσεται) to the boundless and infinite."[4] Whatever this

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 321, J 95,23-26.

[2] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 300D, D 1. #5.

[3] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 321, J 1. 95,26 - 96,2.

[4] De an., MG 3. 97A; similarly, In Cant. 5, MG 1. 873, J 6. 157,21-22 (πρόεισιν).

practice may imply, it at least appears to be too consistent to be merely an accident of style.

The argument for God's infinity is also expressed, in a similar thoughtwhat one might call a more "physical" form, and more at length, in the life of Moses, this time under the rubric of the Beautiful (although here again the near-synonymity of the Beautiful with the Good is apparent, in that the opposite mentioned for the former is not the ugly, but evil). Moses was clearly taught that

> . . . the divine is by its own nature infinite, not encompassed by any limit. For if God were understood as in any limit, what is beyond the limit would of necessity have to be considered along with it. For what is bounded certainly ends at something, as air is the boundary of wings, and water of aquatic creatures. As then all the parts of the fish are enveloped by water, and the winged thing by the air, . . . so, if the divine were understood as in a limit, it would necessarily be encompassed by something of another kind and nature than itself. And logical reasoning testifies that what encloses is much greater than what is enclosed.
>
> Now it is certainly admitted that the divine is, by its nature, beautiful. But what is of another nature with regard to the beautiful is certainly something other than the beautiful; and we comprehend that what is outside of the beautiful is in the nature of evil. But it was shown that the encompasser is much greater than the encompassed. Therefore it is completely necessary that those who think that the divine is in a limit must also agree that it is enveloped by evil. And since the encompassed is certainly made less than its encompasser, it would follow that what is in excess would gain the conquest. Therefore he who encloses the divine in a limit arranges for the beautiful to be overcome by its opposite. But that is, of course, absurd. No encompassment of the infinite nature, then, will be conceivable.[1]

Nevertheless, although we can be aware of and demonstrate this exigency of the divine nature, for us God's infinity is still inscrutable and ineffable:

> . . . Any speech that promises to enclose and interpret the divine nature by the meaning of a name is like one who thinks he can hold the entire sea in the palm of his hand. For what the hollow of

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[1] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 404BC, D 2. ##236-38; cf. De an., MG 3. 97A.

> the hand is relatively to the whole ocean, that every power of words is with regard to the unutterable and unencompassable nature.[1]

But no more need be said of that subject now, since it forms part of the theme of the following chapter.

The infinity of God is, it will be remembered, the difference due to which man can be the image of God without being identical with Him.[2] But it is also the ground of the possibility of a participation of God that will be infinite, throughout eternity: the soul can never exhaust the riches of His reality.[3] Growth in participation and successive awareness of ever new treasures bring the soul to a realization of His completely uncircumscribed boundlessness.[4]

"God is Simple"

God must also be simple (ἁπλοῦς or ἀσύνθετος, without apparent difference of meaning), that is, opposed to whatever is various, multiform, composed, or has its being in parts.[5] Gregory is quite emphatic on the need to admit this attribute:

> But that the divine and blessed nature which transcends every intellect is simple, we do not think even the very brutish and

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[1] C. Eun. 3/5, MG 2. 761, J 2. 180,7-12. For a sample of other texts with the same theme, see: In Res. iii, MG 3. 668B; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 364-68, J 1. 133,27 - 136,27; MG 456-57, J 217,26 - 219,7; 2, MG 932-33, J 245,19 - 246,16; 3/1, MG 601-02, J 2. 38,17 - 41,18; 3/5, MG 760-61, J 179,22 - 180,12; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729, J 5. 411,9 - 416,10; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 892-93, J 6. 179,20 - 182,4; Non tres dii, MG 2. 129, J 3/1. 52,13 - 53,3.

[2] De an., MG 3. 41C-44A.

[3] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 340, J 1. 113,15-20; In Cant. 8, MG 1. 940-41, J 6. 245,11 - 246,5; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301AB, D 1. ##7-8.

[4] In Cant. 12, MG 1. 1037, J 6. 369,15 - 370,13.

[5] Hom. op. 5, MG 1. 137D; De Spir., MG 2. 1304D, J 3/1. 91,2-6.

> lowly of mind would dispute. For what is formless and without figure, remote from any quality and from quantity of size, how could one conceive of as multiform and composite?[1]

This suggests, although it is not stated, the implied argument to the divine simplicity from the fact that God is immaterial; it is the fact, at any rate, that he frequently (one might almost say usually) mentions the two together.[2] Further, this simplicity is not a matter of degree, "for what is by its nature simple and without parts and uncomposed, whatever it chance to be, is this wholly and completely, not becoming one thing from another as a result of some change but abiding in what it is for eternity."[3]

The fact of God's simplicity has a number of consequences. The first has been stressed already:

> For who does not know that by its own essence the simplicity of the Holy Trinity does not admit of more and less? For where it is impossible to think of any mixture and concurrence of qualities, but the mind grasps a power without parts or composition, how and by virtue of what reason could anyone discover difference by more and less?[4]

With regard to an even greater absurdity, Gregory thunders: "There neither is nor ever shall be any such teaching (δόγμα) in the Church of God as that He who is simple and uncomposed could appear to be not only multiform and various, but even composed of opposites"--such as the ἀγεννησία ("unbegottenness") and γεννησία ("begottenness") which the Eunomians were proposing as the essences of, respectively,

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 321, J 1. 94,17-22.

[2] Virg. 11, MG 3. 364D, J 8/1. 293,6-7; De an., MG 3. 93C.

[3] C. Eun. 3/8, MG 2. 848, J 2. 257,6-9.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 321, J 1. 94,26 - 95,4.

the Father and the Son.[1] There is no multiplicity even in the activity of God's thought.[2] Everything in Him must be understood together, as simultaneous, such as willing the good and possessing what He wills.[3] This also extends, then, to our names for God:

> But now who is there so lowly of mind and so uninitiate in the magnificence of the divine teachings that, having mentally grasped the cause of all things, he cannot draw together a collective and compact understanding of what we reverently understand about God, but has to consider them as having come, one later, another in the beginning, and some other in the middle, in some orderly sequence?
>
> For one who rationally examines one of the things that are reverently said of God cannot possibly come upon another fact or notion which can surpass the former in antiquity. Rather, every divine name and every sublime conception, every tongue and thought involving fitting conceptions about God, is fastened and united to the others, and all notions about God are comprehended as compacted and collected in continuity with one another: Fatherhood, Unbegottenness, Power, Incorruption, Goodness, Authority, and all the rest.[4]

This simplicity is not affected by the fact that we can distinguish "something in common" (κοινότης) and "something proper" (ἰδιότης) in God: that is, that some of His attributes are, in a sense, shared with the creatures that participate in Him, while others are proper to Him alone. This introduces no real division into the divine essence, since these distinguished aspects are merely attributed to Him but are not His essence.[5] For this kind of analysis is necessary only from the standpoint of the weakness of human knowledge:

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 461, J 1. 222,15-18.

[2] Hom. op. 5, MG 1. 137D.

[3] C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 776, J 2. 192,1-4.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 432, J 1. 195,23 - 196,10.

[5] C. Eun. 3/10, MG 2. 905, J 2. 308,14 - 309,6.

> Who is so stupefied as to be ignorant that the divine nature, whatever it be in its essence, is one, simple and single-form and uncomposed, and can in no way be considered as in any composite variety; but that the low-lying human soul, buried deep in this earthly life, because of its inability to see clearly what it seeks strains out to the unutterable nature in many ways, from many directions, and with a multitude of notions, not hunting the concealed with a single thought? For simple indeed would comprehension be if some one approach to knowledge of God had been marked off for us. But as it is, through the wisdom apparent in the universe we conceive that the one who directs it is wise, and through the great achievement of its wonders we receive the impression of power, and the belief that the whole is suspended from Him becomes a testimony that there is no cause of His existence. . . .
>
> We do not split up the subject by these notions but, whatever it is in its essence, while we believe that it is one, we regard all these conceptions as fitting for the subject we have in mind. For these names do not conflict with one another in the manner of contraries, so that if one belongs to it another is incompatible with it (as life and death are inconceivable at the same time about the same person), but the content of each of the statements made about the divine nature is such that, even if it is proper to the one it is referred to, it is not opposed to the name applied along with it.
>
> For what opposition is there between "just" and "incorporeal," even if the expressions are not identical in content? What conflict is there between "goodness" and "invisibility"? And thus not even the eternity of the divine life, although it is expressed by a double name and conception, "endless" and "without beginning," is separated by the difference of names: neither is one the same as the other in meaning (for the one expresses lack of beginning, the other absence of end), nor does the difference of the attributes understood about it effect any partition of the subject.[1]

Finally, from the fact that there is no combination of unlike elements in God, we can realize that He is perfect.[2] The soul can also share in the divine simplicity, though whether it does so by nature or as a result of its spiritual progress is not entirely clear.[3]

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1069, J 1. 364,32 - 366,8.

[2] De Spir., MG 2. 1304D, J 3/1. 91,2-6.

[3] De an., MG 3. 93C.

"God is Changeless"

The truth that God is not subject to change has been implied often in the preceding pages: He is ever the same, established in Himself, and knows neither increase nor decrease.[1] This is one of the characteristics attributed to Him by Scripture, and in fact is closely involved with the divine name, "I am who Am," revealed to Moses. For any change would require some not-being in at least one of its terms.[2] Like all other "remotive" names, this attribute stresses that God has nothing in common with things here below by denying that creatures' properties belong in Him: "The content of these names indicates what the divine is not; but what that is in its nature that is not these remains in obscurity."[3]

God is immutable inasmuch as, being uncreated, He does not come to be; therefore He makes all things change, lest a share in this property of His nature might give a creature the appearance of being divine: so earth is changing but motionless, while the heavens, which do not change, are in motion.[4] This attribute is also implied by His simplicity, and by the fact that He is the source of all good and beauty and has nothing in common with evil.[5]

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[1] Virg. 11, MG 3. 368, J 8/1. 296,15-20; C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 933, J 1. 246,23-27; Or. Dom. 1, MG 1. 1140B-41A.

[2] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 409A, MG 1. 174,24-28; 3/6, MG 768-69, J 2. 186,9 - 187,19; cf. Ps. 101:26-28.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1104-05, J 1. 395,14 - 396,13.

[4] Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184; cf. 1, MG 129D-32A.

[5] C. Eun. 3/8, MG 2. 848, J 2. 257,6-9; 4, MG 469, J 315,20-26; In Cant. 5, MG 1. 873D-76A, J 6. 158,8-12.

This changelessness involves the absolute self-identity of the divine nature: "What God is now He is always, becoming neither worse nor better as the result of addition, not receiving anything else from anyone else and being altered; He is forever the same as Himself."[1] Thus He admits of no interval, addition, nor reception.[2] It is impossible that He increase, since He is infinite; nor can He grow less, since He is ἀπαθής: without either passion or receptivity.[3] There can be no change of will in Him, for its causes, error and ignorance, are foreign to Him.[4] And despite the fact that all things that are participate in His reality, He is in no way diminished by the participation.[5]

Immutability evidently implies the divine eternity, and in fact the two ideas are constantly associated.[6] Eternity is really the expression of the infinity of God's life; in its lack of any discernible beginning or end, it can be compared, partially, to the circle of the geometer:

> If, starting from the present instant as a central point, we intently and actively direct our thoughts in every direction

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 433, J 1. 196,27 - 197,1.

[2] Ibid., MG 304, J 79,2-8; 2, MG 933, J 246,14 - 247,4; 3/7, MG 808, J 2. 221,22 - 222,10; 4, MG 472, J 316,19 - 317,17.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 933, J 1. 247,1-4.

[4] C. Eun. 3/7, MG 2. 808, J 2. 221,22-27.

[5] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 333BC, D 2. #25.

[6] See, for example: Virg. 11, MG 3. 368, J 8/1. 296,15-20; Hom. op. 16, MG 1. 184; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 433, J 1. 196,27 - 197,1, et passim; Or. Dom. 1, MG 1. 1140; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197AB; 3, MG 1225; De perf., MG 3. 269, J 8/1. 194,11-14; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 333BC, D 2. #25.

> toward the infinity of His life, we are pulled about always in the same way by incomprehensibility; we grasp the divine life as continuous and withoutiinterval in relation to itself in every conceivable direction, and are able to recognize no bound in any part of it.[1]

In His changelessness, too, God is to be imitated by man: "He who is unalterable cannot be the Father of one who is mutable."[2] The desire of the soul purified of all things earthly is for that Beauty which is always the same, incapable of any alteration.[3]

"God is Wise and Powerful"

Gregory normally mentions God's wisdom and power together--possibly under the influence of St. Paul's reference to Christ as "God's power and God's wisdom" (I Cor. 1:24).[4] In fact, although we do not know His essence, "when we conceive wisdom itself (αὐτοσοφία) and power itself (αὐτοδύναμις), we believe that we have mentally apprehended God."[5] Both are enumerated among the goods that belong to Him.[6] The inexpressible wisdom of God apparent in the universe convinces us that the divine nature and power are in all things, that all may remain in being.[7] It is His wisdom that determines the mea-

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 457A, J 1. 218,11-17.

[2] Or. Dom. 2, MG 1. 1141A.

[3] Virg. 11, MG 3. 368, J 8/1. 296,14-23.

[4] For example: De an., MG 3. 28A, 48A; In Res. iii, MG 3. 665B; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 409A, J 1. 174, 27; In d. lum., MG 3. 584D; Or. Dom. 2, MG 1. 1140C; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197A; Nat. Chr., MG 3. 1149A; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784A, J 6. 37,16.

[5] Hex., MG 1. 72C; cf. In Cant. 1, MG 1. 765D, J 6. 17,5-6; MG 781, J 36,7-8.

[6] Nat. Chr., MG 3. 1149A.

[7] De an., MG 3. 44A.

sures in which all creation is embraced.[1]

He is the fountain and source of all wisdom.[2] Wisdom is, as it were, a voice of God, or one proclaiming God; so the arrangement of events in the work of creation is, for its wisdom, called His voice and command: "For truly everything that comes to be in wisdom is a word of God, not articulated by any vocal organs, but uttered through the very wonders in visible things."[3] It is the word of all creation announcing its Creator, a word of which the eye, beholding the visible world, is the hearer, and which resounds in the heart.[4] The divine wisdom is also incomprehensible, ineffable, and limitless.[5]

The power of God is changeless and unreceived, transcending every other power and nature in the universe.[6] Again, it is beyond comprehension or verbal utterance; even the description given by Scripture, magnificent though it be, falls short of expressing the really Real.[7] It is infinite power: nothing is impossible to God, who brings not-being into being and gives further qualities at His pleasure to the things that are.[8] "We call the maker of mortals 'Demi-

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 933, J 1. 246,17-18.

[2] In Res. iii, MG 3. 665B. [3] Hex., MG 1. 88C, cf. 72C.

[4] De an., MG 3. 25A; In Res. iii, MG 3. 665C.

[5] In Res. iii, MG 3. 668A; De an., MG 3. 44A; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 765D, J 6. 17,5-6.

[6] Or. Dom. 2, MG 1. 1140C; De an., MG 3. 92C; De deit., MG 3. 564C; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197A.

[7] Beat. 7, MG 1. 1280A; Hom. op. 2, MG 1. 133A; In d. lum., MG 3. 584D.

[8] Hom. op. 23, MG 1. 212B; In Res. iii, MG 3. 668A; cf. Vit. Greg., MG 3. 920A.

urge,' and Him who exercises dominion over such a creation 'powerful': His power is sufficient to make His will reality (οὐσία)."[1] It pervades all things and embraces them, keeping them in existence.[2] It impels and bears along all things that exist.[3] One and the same divine power fits the parts to the whole and completes it in its parts, containing the entire universe.[4]

It is God's power that is manifested in the wonders wrought by such saints as Gregory Thaumaturgus.[5] Man is put into the world to trace the divine power through the marvels of the visible creation.[6] That power is even so great that God can accommodate it to the debility of ours:

> The cause of the acceptance by God of commerce with man we define as love of man (φιλανθρωπία). Since what is little by nature is incapable of rising above its own limits and touching the height of the transcendent nature, on this account He Himself brings down His "philanthropic" power to our weakness, so that we can receive it, and so distributes the graces and help coming from Himself.
>
> For as, by the divine dispensation, the sun mingles the pure vehemence of its rays with the middle air and so gives radiance and heat commensurate with those who receive them, though in itself unapproachable to the weakness of our nature; so, too, the divine power, similarly to the example before us, infinitely elevated above our nature and inaccessible for participation, like a mother mercifully lisping along with the senseless babbling of her little ones, distributing to human nature what it is capable of receiving. And because of this, in the various theophanies to men He takes on a human form and speaks with a man's voice and assumes wrath and mercy and such passions, that through all things that

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1105, J 1. 396,27-30.

[2] De an., MG 3. 44A; De deit., MG 3. 564A; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 724D-25A, J 5. 406,1-7.

[3] Or. Dom. 2, MG 1. 1140C.

[4] De an., MG 3. 28A.

[5] Vit. Greg., MG 3. 920A.

[6] Hom. op. 2, MG 1. 133A; cf. In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 37,14 - 38,2.

> correspond to us our childish life may be led by the hand, in touch with the divine nature through the words of Providence.[1]

With this, the consideration is complete of the more affirmative or "cataphatic" element of Gregory's doctrine on the content of our knowledge of God. We know much, and not all has been mentioned here--nor even the greatest. This account has ignored, as beyond its purpose, the constant reference of the Christian theologian to the magnalia Dei, the feats of God in the ancient dispensation and in the new, giving Himself to men and calling them, through faith, to fellowship and union with Himself. These are the truths of faith in the strictest sense: Gregory does not, of course, ignore them, and the fact should at least be mentioned.

But we do not know all, or nearly all. The preceding pages have mentioned that often, though in passing; it must now be discussed explicitly. The purpose of the next chapter, then, will be to examine the limits to which all human knowledge of God is subjected, as well as the metaphysical root which Gregory assigns to those limitations.

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1049, J 1. 348,12 - 349,1.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIMITS OF KNOWING

Although one might reasonably expect that the matter of the sixth chapter had rounded off and completed the study of this doctrine on the scope and manner of our knowledge of God, such is far from the case; there is more than one peripeteia still in store for him who follows with Gregory of Nyssa the traces of the soul's quest for God. The knowledge just detailed and analyzed is of great value, to be sure, for it is knowledge of Him whom we seek. But it cannot be the end of the quest, for most clearly it does not satisfy the thirsting soul.

To penetrate further into the question, however, it is necessary to consider an aspect raised but not settled in the chapter just completed. There we considered the content of the knowledge we have, or can acquire, about God; now it is time to turn our attention to the question how extensive is that knowledge concerning Him. When we know all this, in other words--that God is the really Real, the Good, the Beautiful, infinite and changeless and all the rest--how much do we really know? How close have we come to Him? What proportion can be found between what we know and Him we desire to know? To such questions as these this study must now turn.

"God is Incomprehensible"

Through all that has preceded in the four previous chapters, there has arisen constantly the theme that is like a strong cable running through all Gregory's writings from beginning to end, the theme which he repeats and emphasizes more than any other, on every possible occasion and in every way that presents itself to his inventive mind: the incomprehensibility of God. This is the most important factor to take into account in assessing his doctrine on the knowledge of God.

Very simply, it is this: we do not and cannot know the divine essence, now or ever.[1] Nor, for that matter, can any created intellect; Gregory's mind on the matter is clear, although there is an interesting admixture of caution and confidence in his language:

> There is no power in human nature for a clear perception of the essence of God. And perhaps it is too little to deny this of human power alone, and one who avers that even the incorporeal creation is less than enough to reach the infinite nature and embrace it in knowledge will not be entirely mistaken.
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> Such a truth can be seen from examples familiar to us. Many and varied are the beings to whose lot a fleshly life falls: some winged, others on the ground. And if that which soars above the

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[1] The following is just a selection of the texts, spread over the range of Gregory's writing career, in which he makes this point: De an., MG 3. 57B; Hom. op. 11, MG 1. 156AB; Hex., MG 1. 72C; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 365-68, J 1. 134,17 - 137,8; MG 461, J 222,15 - 223,8; 2, MG 913-16, J 230,18-30; MG 932-33, J 245,19 - 246,16; MG 937, J 250, 2-8; MG 940-45, J 251,21 - 257,25; MG 956, J 265,23 - 266,14; MG 1069, J 364,32 - 365,9; 3/1, MG 601-04, J 2. 38,4 - 41,5; MG 613, J 49,24-27; 3/5, MG 761-64, J 181,21 - 182,4; 4, MG 473, J 319,3-12; Vit. Greg., MG 3. 901A-C; De Trin., J 3/1. 10,18 - 11,3; De deit., MG 3. 557CD; De Spir., J 3/1. 114,21 - 115,4; Or. cat. 16, MG 2. 72BC; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197AB; 3, MG 1225B-26A; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 728-32, J 5. 410,19 - 416,10; In Cant. 1, MG 781-84, J 6. 36,12 - 39,1; 3, MG 820-21, J 86,12 - 88,6; MG 824, J 89,15 - 91,13; 5, MG 873, J 157,14-21; 6, MG 892-93, J 179,20 - 183,10; 8, MG 940-41, J 245,11 - 247,18; 11, MG 1009-12, J 333,13 - 337,21; 12, MG 1028, J 357,3-19; De perf., MG 3. 264, J 8/1. 188,2-5; MG 269, J 194,4-15; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301A, D 1. #7; MG 357C, D 2. #110; MG 376D-77B, D 2. ##162-65; MG 404B-D, D 2. ##234-39.

> clouds on the power of wings and those that are settled and dwell in the hollows of the earth be compared with each other, no little difference would appear to obtain between the airy and the earthly; but if the comparison is with the stars and the motionless sphere, that which journeys through the air will be judged no less far from the heaven than the animals that walk on earth.
>
> Similarly, the power of the angels appears greatly superior in comparison with ours, since they tend toward lofty realities with a knowing power bare and unveiled, in no way clouded by sensation; but if even their comprehension be examined in comparison with the mightiness of the really Real, perhaps one who would dare to say that their power too is not much less distant than our littleness from seeing God will not be so rash as to exceed what is likely. For great and impassable is the intervening space by which the uncreated nature is walled off from created being.[1]

For if men could be taught to understand the essence of God, it is unmistakably evident that He who "wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4) would not have kept silence on so important a matter.[2] On the other hand, if God's nature were comprehensible to human reasoning, Christian truth would not be essentially superior to the wisdom of the Greeks; since it is far beyond the reach of our reasonings, however, faith goes before even to what are above our comprehension.[3] Consequently it is both futile and wrong for a man even to seek such knowledge: it is too deep for his powers; he would be forced to guess and thereby would lay open a way of entry for error as well as for truth. The heresies are sure evidence that this possibility is all too ready at hand.[4] The basic

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 932-33, J 1. 245,19 - 246,16; cf. also ibid. 1, MG 461, J 222,18-22; In Cant. 3, MG 1. 820-21, J 6. 86,12 - 87,8 (and notice in this passage the kind of phrase Gregory frequently uses: τὴν πάντα νοῦν ὑπερέχουσαν φύσιν); 6, MG 893, J 182,4 - 183,5; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 377A, D 2. ##163-64.

[2] C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 473, J 2. 319,3-6.

[3] Vit. Greg., MG 3. 901A-C.

[4] See the whole passage: C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 944-45, J 1. 255,1 - 258,1.

folly of the Eunomians, for instance, lies in their conviction that a negative idea can express the essence of God.[1] But in fact any idea or notion that proposes to represent the divine essence, far from making God known, succeeds merely in fashioning an idol of Him.[2]

The fact is so basic, and ultimately inescapable: our knowledge simply cannot surpass what is knowable, and neither thought nor words can touch Being (or "Him who Is") itself.[3] In fact, our deepest knowledge of God is knowledge of this very fact: that He is incomprehensible. Gregory revels in the paradox:

> This, then, is the Being . . . higher than any principle, affording no signs of its own nature, but known only by the fact that it cannot be comprehended. For this is its most proper characteristic: that its nature is loftier than any distinguishing idea.[4]

> But [the mind] conjectures something of what it seeks through the contact of reasoning and somehow apprehends it by its very inability to perceive, making for itself a sort of clear knowledge of the fact that what it seeks is beyond all knowledge.[5]

Later, this doctrine is more profound and more emphatic:

> For [the soul,] abandoning all that appears, not only such as sense comprehends, but also whatever thought seems to behold, constantly advances within until, by the inquiring activity of the mind, it reaches the unbeheld and incomprehensible, and there sees God. For in this is the true sight of the Sought and in this the seeing: in not seeing. For the Sought transcends all sight, from every aspect enshrouded in incomprehensibility as in a dark cloud. Therefore the lofty John, who had been in this brilliant darkness, says: "No one has at any time seen God." . . . So when Moses be-

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[1] See C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 452, J 1. 213, 19-24; and cf. ibid. 2, MG 973, J 280,22-30.

[2] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 377B, D 2. #165.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 929, J 1. 243,21-25; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 781, J 6. 36,15-20.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 368, J 1. 137,1-8.

[5] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 956, J 1. 266,3-6.

> came greater in knowledge, he confessed that he saw God in the darkness, that is, that then he knew that the divine is by nature what is superior to all knowledge and comprehension. . . . He learned first what is to be known of God: that is, to know nothing of Him that human comprehension knows.[1]

Therefore every token of comprehension of the divine nature is really an obstacle to knowing God.[2] So we can only guess about Him by remote analogies and our thought is only a weak likeness of Him, an enigmatic silhouette.[3] As has been indicated previously, the image of God in man, particularly as realized through the possession of virtue, is also like God in the fact that it is beyond our understanding.[4]

This characteristic of God is evidenced by our inability to comprehend even His activities; Gregory instances the production of light.[5] With respect to them, too, we are reduced to conjecture;[6] as has been mentioned, our knowledge is limited to those of His activities that "come down to us."[7] His power utterly escapes the grasp of

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[1] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 377, D 2, ##163-66; cf. C. Eun. 3/1, MG 2. 604, J 2. 40,16-22; Beat. 3, MG 1. 1225B-28A; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 779D - 80A, J 5. 414,2-9; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 893, J 6. 182,18 - 183,3.

[2] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 893, J 6. 183,4-5; cf. Vit. Mos., MG 1. 404B, D 2. ##234-35.

[3] In Cant. 1, MG 1. 781, J 6. 36,18 - 37,3; 5, MG 860, J 139, 1-9; 11, MG 1004, J 6. 325,21 - 327,7; 3, MG 820, J 85,10 - 86,18.

[4] Hom. op. 11, MG 1. 156AB; cf. In Cant. 3, MG 1. 824, J 6. 89,15 - 91,13.

[5] In Res. iii, MG 3. 665B; Hex., MG 1. 76A.

[6] De an., MG 3. 57B; In d. lum., MG 3. 584D.

[7] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 732, J 5. 415,19-20; In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1009, J 6. 334,5-9.

reason;[1] so do His judgments.[2] We must always bear in mind that we do not even understand creation.[3]

The ultimate ontological root of the unknowability of God, as Gregory repeatedly and emphatically avers, is His infinity, due to which He is infinitely more than we can ever understand.[4] Consequently, reasoning about Him should never come to an end: no matter how high the soul may ascend, whatever she has attained at any given moment is only the beginning of a desire for something superior.[5] For reasoning is limited to aion, to form, place, size, measure, and so forth; creation absolutely cannot surpass its own limits:

> One who tries to embrace the infinite in words is no longer conceding that that against which he is arraying his own word is what is above all: he is considering it as of such a kind and so great as words can express, unaware that it is only in being persuaded that the divine is beyond knowledge (γνῶσις) that a conception of the really Real worthy of God is preserved.
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> Why? Because whatever is in creation looks to its kin by nature, and no being that gets out of itself remains in being: not

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[1] Hom. op. 2, MG 1. 133A; In d. lum., MG 3. 584D; De Spir. (this section of the work is missing from the text used in Migne), J 3/1. 114,31 - 115,4; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 781, J 6. 36,12-15; 12, MG 1024, J 352,14-17; cf. C. Eun. 2, MG 1. 1049, J 1. 384,12 - 385,1.

[2] C. Eun. 3/1, MG 2. 601-04, J 2. 39,15 - 40,8.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 937, J 1. 250,3-6; In Cant. 11, MG 1. 1012, J 6. 337,5-21; cf. Vit. Mos., MG 1. 357C, D 2. #110.

[4] This, again, is only a selection from a multitude of texts: In Res. iii, MG 3, 668B; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 364-68, J 1. 133,27 - 137,8; 2, MG 932-33, J 245,19 - 247,4; Beat. 3, MG 1. 1225B; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 38,5-8; 5, MG 873-76, J 147,14 - 148,15; 6, MG 892, J 179,20 - 180,4; 8, MG 940-41, J 245,22 - 246,12; 11, MG 997-1000, J 320,8 - 321,22; MG 1012, J 337,1-2; Non tres dii, MG 2. 129, J 3/1. 52,15-18; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 404C, D 2. #238; De perf., MG 3. 268, J 8/1. 194,11-14.

[5] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 364-65, J 1. 134,17-26; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 889-92, J 6. 178,19 - 180,7; 8, MG 941, J 247,9-18; 12, MG 1024, J 352,14-17; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 404D, D 2. #239.

> fire in water nor water in fire, not land in the depths nor the moist in dry land, not the earthly in air nor the airy on earth. Instead each, remaining in the limits of its own nature, is only as long as it stays within the limits of its own nature. If it should get out of itself, it will also get out of being.
>
> Further, as the power of the senses cannot remain within their proper activities and at the same time pass over to the adjacent sense (for neither does the eye perform the act of hearing nor does the touch converse . . .), but for each its natural activity is the limit of its own power: in the same way the whole of creation cannot get out of itself by a comprehensive contemplation, but remains ever in itself and, whatever it sees, beholds itself. And if it thinks to behold anything beyond itself, it does not have such a nature as to see what is outside itself. It struggles, it may be, to pass by the conception of interval in the contemplation of things, but does not pass it by. For along with every understanding it discovers, it necessarily considers the interval comprehended together with the reality (ὑπόστασις) of what it understands. But interval is nothing other than creation. But that Good which we have learned to seek and keep, to which we have been counseled to join ourselves and to cohere, is above comprehension as it is above creation. For how could our thought, which proceeds within intervallar extension, comprehend the nature without interval.[1]

It follows, too, that there can be nothing in creation that affords any outline or example of the divine Being, or that can be considered to yield any interpretation of it.[2]

Finally, since Gregory of course does not fail to adduce abundant Scriptural authority for so important a doctrine, it is worth while to present here some of the great variety of texts he finds to support it:

> "No man can see My face and live." (Ex. 33:20)
>
> Be not rash with your mouth and let not your mind be in haste to utter a word before God; for God is in the heavens and you are on the earth. So let your words be few. (Eccles. 5:2)

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[1] In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729-32, J 5. 411,9 - 412,19; cf. C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 365, J 1. 134,27 - 136,7.

[2] In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 38,22 - 39,1; 12, MG 1028, J 357,3-20; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 317B, D 1. #47.

"To whom will you liken Me, to whom make Me equal? With whom will you compare Me, that we should be like one another? (Is. 46:5; and cf. 40:18,25)

No one has at any time seen God. (Jn. 1:18)

"You have never heard [My Father's] voice nor seen His form. (Jn. 5:37)

How inexhaustible are the resources, wisdom, and knowledge of God! How unfathomable are His decisions, and how untraceable His ways! (Rom. 11:33)

. . . There are things "which no eye ever saw and no ear ever heard, and never occurred to the human mind, which God has provided for those who love Him." (I Cor. 2:9)

[Paul] heard things that must not be told, which no human being can repeat. (II Cor. 12:4)

. . . the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. (I Tim. 6:15-16)

For now we are looking through an enigma in a mirror . . . . (I Cor. 13:12)

And in this connection it is interesting to note that he does not, in his citations, usually finish the last verse quoted: ". . . but then we shall see Him face to face." Nor does he ever, as far as I know, mention (much less comment on) I John 3:2: ". . . we shall see Him as He is."[1] It would be interesting to see what explanation he would give of these and similar texts, of which Scripture contains several; they do constitute a difficulty (perhaps not insuperable) against the full application of his doctrine of epektasis (to be discussed in the following chapter). But he ignores them.

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[1]There is no need here for detailed references to the places where Gregory cites all these texts; the reader who is interested can trace most of them by consulting the Scriptural indices to the commentaries on Ecclesiastes and, especially, the Song of Songs, in the fifth and sixth volumes of the Jaeger edition (unfortunately, the only two volumes of the set thus far supplied with such an index).

"God is Ineffable"

The immediate corollary of the truth that God is incomprehensible is that He is ineffable, and this, too, Gregory asserts frequently and emphatically.

> Again in what follows the soul, the bride, touches a loftier philosophy, indicating that the divine power is inaccessible and unapproachable to human reasoning, when she says, "Thy name is a perfume emptied out" (Cant. 1:3). For it seems to me that through this expression some such message is meant as that the infinite nature cannot be accurately embraced by any signification of a name. Rather all the power of thought and all the significance of nouns and verbs, however great and worthy of God they seem to be, are simply not of such a nature as to contact Being itself (or "Himself"). But as if from some traces and glimmerings, our language aims at the Obscure through what it comprehends, imagining the incomprehensible from some analogy.
>
> For whatever name we invent, she says, to denote the perfume of divinity, we do not express the perfume itself through the meaning of what we say; we indicate only a little remnant of the odor of the divine fragrance by our names expressive of God (θεολογικὰ ὀνόματα). As with jars from which the perfume has been emptied, we are ignorant of what kind of perfume, in its own nature, it is that has been poured out; yet we can make some guess about it for ourselves from a dim quality of its odors left in the jar. This, then, is what we learn from the text: that the perfume of the divinity itself, whatever it be in its essence, is above every name and thought. But the wonders beheld in the universe give the matter of our "theological" names, through which we name Him wise, powerful, good, holy, blessed and eternal, and judge and savior, and so forth. They all indicate a little quality of the divine perfume, of which all creation, through the wonders beheld in it, retains the impression, like a perfume-vessel.[1]

Frequently, too, he takes pains to indicate that this is the authentic doctrine of Scripture.[2]

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[1] In Cant. 1, MG 1. 781-84, J 6. 36,12 - 37,2. Again, a scattering of texts with the same import: Virg. 10, MG 3. 360C, J 8/1. 288,20-22; C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 461, J 1. 222,18-25; 2, MG 960, J 268, 24-28; 3/5, MG 760-61, J 2. 179,24 - 180,12; De Spir., J 3/1. 114,31 - 115,4; Beat. 7, MG 1. 1277D-80C; In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 632, J 5. 293,2 - 294,5; In Cant. 3, MG 1. 820, J 6. 85,15 - 87,5.

[2] For example: Virg. 10, MG 3. 360, J 8/1. 288,22-26; 13, MG 376, J 304,10-14; C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1108, J 1. 397,23-31; 3/5, MG 761-74, J 2. 180,24 - 182,4; 3/6, MG 769, J 187,4-11; 3/9, MG 873,

Again, the ground of this truth is the infinity of God:

> If anyone should insist on some explanation, description, or interpretation of the divine Being, we will not deny that we are uninstructed in such wisdom, professing only this much: that the infinite by nature cannot be embraced by any invention of speech. . . . So if explanation through nouns and verbs somehow embraces its subject in its meaning, and if the infinite cannot be encompassed, no one would have any right to blame our ignorance for not plunging rashly into what should not be dared. For with what name shall I encompass the incomprehensible? By what word shall I announce the inexpressible? Since, then, the divine is greater and loftier than the meaning of a name, we have learned to honor with silence what are above word and thought.[1]

To embrace the infinite God by a name is like trying to hold the sea in the hollow of one's hand.[2] Consequently, He is incommunicable;[3] for we know no example of Him nor anything comparable to Him.[4] This was what David was implying when he exclaimed sharply, "Every man is

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J 279,16-23; 4, MG 473, J 318,3 - 319,15; De deit., MG 3. 573D; Beat. 4, MG 1. 1241BC; 7, MG 1277C-80D; In Cant. 3, MG 1. 820, J 6. 85,20 - 86,6; 12, MG 1028, J 358,3-17; Non tres dii, MG 2. 121, J 3/1. 42,13 - 43,2.

Some of the Scriptural texts he cites in this connection are: Jgs. 13:18; Ps. 8:2; Cant. 5:6; Eph. 1:2; and, especially often, II Cor. 12:1-4 (Paul's account of his rapture beyond the third heaven), and Phil. 2:9 (". . . above every name"; explicit attention is devoted to this in the following pages of the present section).

[1] C. Eun. 3/1, MG 2. 601, J 2. 38,17 - 39,6.

[2] C. Eun. 3/5, MG 2. 760-61, J 2. 179,24 - 180,12; see also In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 729, J 5. 411,9-14 (quoted supra, the beginning of the text on p. 131); In Cant. 1, MG 1. 781, J 6. 36,15-17 (quoted supra, the first paragraph of the text on the preceding page [134]); Non tres dii, MG 2. 129, J 3/1. 52,15 - 53,3.

[3] Virg. 10, MG 3. 360, J 8/1. 288,18-22; C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 941, J 1. 253,18-22; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 728-29, J 5. 411,2-9; In Cant. 3, MG 1. 820, J 6. 85,16 - 86,2; De perf., MG 3. 264, J 8/1. 187,15 - 188,16.

[4] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361, J 8/1. 289,18-26; Beat. 7, MG 1. 1277D-80C; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 784, J 6. 38,22 - 39,1.

a liar!" (Ps. 115:2)[1]

Words are, so to speak, shadows of events.[2] All created things are embraced by names, which direct our thoughts to them and, as it were, imprint their pictures on our minds.[3] All genuine speech is an indication of the activity of thought: it can only express what we know.[4] In fact, Gregory has frequent occasion to stress, it does not even do that at all adequately.[5] Not only is our thought a deficient likeness, a silhouette (σκιογραφία) "through a mirror and an enigma," but

> . . . any speech expressing such thoughts has the force of a dimensionless point, incapable of exhibiting what the mind desires; so that all thought is inferior to the perception of the divine, and every interpretative word seems a little point that cannot be coextensive with the plane of thought.[6]

Words can only express sensible beauty, not even the "statement of the essence" (ὁ λόγος τῆς οὐσίας) of sensible things.[7]

Consequently, there is no proper name of God--or, if there is one, it is at any rate too great for man to hear. That is why Christ,

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[1] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361, J 8/1. 290,1-14; cf. In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 632, J 5. 293,16 - 294,4.

[2] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 960, J 1. 269,13-14.

[3] C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 473, J 2. 318,6-15; cf. Non tres dii, MG 2. 121, J 3/1. 43,4-9.

[4] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1101, J 1. 393,14-17; MG 1104, J 394,27-31.

[5] For example: Virg. 10, MG 3. 360, J 8/1. 288,22-26; C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 929, J 1. 243,21-28; MG 1104, J 394,6-12; De Spir., MG 2. 1328B, J 3/1. 107,19-21; Beat. 1, MG 1. 1197AB; In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 632, J 5. 293,2-8.

[6] In Cant. 3, MG 1. 821, J 6. 86,19 - 87,5.

[7] Virg. 10, MG 3. 361, J 8/1. 290,14-25; C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1101, J 1. 393,22-26; In Eccl. 1, MG 1. 632, J 5. 293,8-16.

commanding the apostles to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," did not reveal what that Name is.[1] The most perfect instruction of piety is that He is the really Real (τὸ ὄντως ὄν); the expression "He who Is" (ὁ ὤν) indicates that there is no name that characterizes His essence.[2]

This should suffice to establish Gregory's position relative to the claim of Gilson that this "name," the revelation of which to Moses is recounted in Ex. 3:14, is God's proper name, "the principle from which the whole course of Christian philosophy will henceforth be suspended. From this moment it is understood for all time to come that 'Being' is the proper name of God and that, in the expression of St. Ephrem later adopted by St. Bonaventure, this name designates His very essence."[3]

Perhaps. But the reader who has followed this chapter of the present study so far will be somewhat surprised to find Gilson, in his note on the passage just cited, alleging a text of Gregory of Nyssa along with the text of Ephrem with the claim that they are early contributors to a "metaphysic of Exodus."[4] But can Gregory be claiming that "Being" is God's proper name? Or, even more explicitly, that it designates His very essence?

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1104, J 1. 394,27 - 395,3; 4, MG 473, J 2. 318,15-25; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 892, J 6. 181,19 - 182,3; 12, MG 1028, J 357,18 - 359,4.

[2] C. Eun. 4, MG 2. 473, J 2. 319,6-12; cf. 3/9, MG 873, J 279, 16-20.

[3] Etienne Gilson, L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale ("Gifford Lectures," first series; Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1932), p. 54 (and cf. p. 46).

[4] Ibid., p. 231, note 14.

The answer, of course, is "no," and the solution to the difficulty is simple. The text of Gregory cited by Gilson is that given above (Chapter VI, the first text on page 99, and note 1) in which he asserts that the Exodus text reveals "one token of genuine divinity." But Gilson is guilty of deficient scholarship, providing one more instance of the danger involved in quoting a text out of its context.

It is significant that he cites as his source for Gregory's statement Rouët de Journel's handbook of patristic texts.[1] Had he read further in Gregory's own work, he would have reached the continuation of his explanation on the next page of the Contra Eunomium:

> . . . Again in like manner, the word addressed to Manoah indicates that the divine cannot be enveloped by the meaning of its name: for when he sought to learn His name so that, when the promise came to pass, he might glorify his benefactor by name, He said to him: "Why do you ask that? It is also wonderful," that he might learn thereby that there is one name signifying the divine nature: the speechless wonder at it arising in the soul . . . .[2]

It is not much farther on in the same work that he makes the statement already referred to, that what the "name" revealed to Moses really means is that He has "no name by which His essence can be recognized, but transcends all meaning of names."[3] The whole purport, it may be recalled, of his polemic against the Eunomians, is that they dare to propose a proper name (and, by implication, a comprehensive knowledge) of God. His aim is not merely to replace their negative name with a positive one.

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[1] M. J. Rouët de Journel, Enchiridion patristicum. Loci ss. patrum, doctorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum (4th ed.; Friburg-i.-Br.: Herder, 1922), p. 393, text # 1046.

[2] C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 769, J 2. 187,4-11.

[3] See the first sentence on the preceding page (137) and note 2.

It is true that, in the statement in the previous chapter already referred to, Gregory claims that "I am who Am" is "one token" of God; in one of the other texts cited there he goes so far as to say that genuine existence is the "proper token" of divinity.[1] But one must remark the word he uses: he speaks of ἓν or ἴδιον γνώρισμα. This is a token or characteristic, a sign by which someone may be recognized and distinguished from others. The word itself has a connotation of something extrinsic (like the flower in a buttonhole), although it need not necessarily be so. But the point is that there is no need to consider that it refers to something as ontologically fundamental as the essence. It is a "proper" token if it accomplishes the function of setting the being apart from any other with which it might be confused.

Finally, that this is Gregory's meaning may be confirmed by recalling that he has implied that one might say the same about God's infinity,[2] and that he has said explicitly above that His "most proper" (ἰδιαίτατον) token is His incomprehensibility.[3]

Gregory relies most frequently on the Pauline expression according to which God is "above every name" (Phil. 2:9): "not as if this were one name honored above the others, but that the really Real is above every name."[4] One might expect that the name "God," at

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[1] Supra, Chap. VI, p. 98 (the last statement quoted), and note 3.

[2] Ibid., p. 112 (the second text) and note 2.

[3] Supra, p. 129 (first passage quoted) and note 4.

[4] C. Eun. 3/9, MG 2. 873, J 2. 279,20-23; cf. also ibid. 1, MG 461, J 1. 222,18-25; 2, MG 945, J 256,28 - 257,1; MG 1008, J 397, 23-31; In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 725, J 5. 406,7-10; MG 728-29, J 410,19 -

least, would be a proper name, but that is not the case: θεός (equivalent to θεάτης) refers only to His activity of vision.[1] The instruction Paul received when rapt to the third heaven was wordless, a strictly unutterable illumination of the heart.[2]

Yet, despite this transcendence, the loftiest use of speech remains to tell of God.[3] Whatever the Name that escapes us may be, we are sure that what it means is good.[4]

Consequently, we use a variety of names to speak of God or to address Him;[5] for this too, of course, there is abundant Scriptural warrant.[6] But what they tell are His characteristics, not His nature.[7] For the "statement of the essence" is simply impossible and of

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411,14; In Cant. 2, MG 1. 801, J 6. 61,14-16; 6, MG 892-93, J 181,19 - 182,3; Non tres dii, MG 2. 129, J 3/1. 52,21 - 53,3.

[1]This point, too, Gregory repeats frequently. E.g.: C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 960, J 1. 268,25 - 269,2; MG 1108, J 397,8-23; De Trin., J 3/1. 14,5-8; Com. not., MG 2. 177, J 3/1. 21,18 - 22,18; De deit., MG 3. 573D-76A; Non tres dii, MG 2. 121, J 3/1. 44,7-16.

[2]C. Eun. 3/1 (this section of the text is missing in Migne), J 2. 9,12-18; cf. De perf., MG 3. 264-65, J 8/1. 187,15 - 188,16.

[3]Beat. 3, MG 1. 1225B.

[4]In Eccl. 7, MG 1. 725, J 5. 406,7-13.

[5]C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1104, J 1. 394,27 - 395,3; 4, MG 473, J 2. 318, 17-25; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 892, J 6. 181,19-21; 12, MG 1028, J 357,18 - 358,14.

[6]C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 409, J 1. 174,21-28; Beat. 4, MG 1. 1241BC; In Ps. 1.1, MG 1. 433, J 5. 25,20 - 26,4.

[7]C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 960, J 1. 268,25-29; MG 1104, J 394,27 - 395,3; 3/5, MG 761-64, J 2. 180,13 - 182,18; Com. not., MG 2. 177, J 3/1. 21,18 - 22,18; De deit., MG 3. 573D-76A; Beat. 7, MG 1. 1277D-80C; In Cant. 1, MG 1. 781-84, J 6. 36,12 - 37,7; De perf., MG 3. 264-65, J 8/1. 188,6-16.

"Characteristics" may represent better than "attributes" Gregory's constant periphrasis, "what are understood about Him" (cf.

no value to us.[1]

Gregory's doctrine "de divinis nominibus" is elaborated primarily in various parts of the work against Eunomius; much of it is derived from his brother Basil, who had need of such a doctrine for the same controversy. According to this, although our knowledge of the divine nature is most obscure, we acquire sufficient for the littleness of our power from the names reverently predicated of it.[2] The basic concern in speaking of God, of course, is not fine, euphonious utterance, but rather to discover a reverent notion that can preserve what is fitting in our conception of Him.[3]

These names can be either attributive or remotive, expressing

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the explanation of this supra, Chap. IV, pp. 68-69). Although it often has the meaning of metaphysical aspects of God as He is in Himself (and so of attributes in the scholastic sense), perhaps more frequently its connotation is more concrete and existential, like Scriptural language about God: the way God "behaves," acting and manifesting Himself in the "economy." Consider, for instance, the following passage from the De sancta Trinitate (J 3/1. 14, 15-18):

"Therefore the appellation /"God"/ has the connotation of some power of either vision or activity; but in all the names by which it is named, the divine nature, with respect to what it is, by our account remains unexpressed. For when we learn "benefactor" and "judge," "good" and "just" and all other such titles, we are taught differences of activities, but we are no better able for that to come to know, through our perception of the activities, the nature of Him who is active. For when one gives an account of each of these names and of the nature the names apply to, the account he gives of each is not the same; but when the account of two things is not the same, their nature is different. Therefore the nature is one thing, of which no revelatory account has yet been discovered, and the meaning of the names with which it is named on the basis of some activity or dignity is something else."

Cf. also Non tres dii, MG 2. 121, J 3/1. 42,13 - 44,16.

[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 944-45, J 1. 256,15-25.

[2] Ibid., MG 953, J 263,21-26.

[3] Ibid., MG 956, J 265,7-10; cf. MG 1104, J 394,12-27. --The pragmatic Basil may well be present in such statements as these, since they do not conform particularly well to Gregory's own practice.

what "belongs" to God or what is foreign to Him; nevertheless, this distinction is not basic, since for any name of one type an equivalent of the other type can be formed (v.g., attributive: "eternal"; remotive: "incorruptible").[1] As a matter of fact, almost all the names the Church uses to describe God are negative.[2] Since such predicates indicate what is not present in Him (specifically, the limitations which are constitutive of all the things we know), although they are predicated of Him truly, they express what God is not rather than what He is.[3]

Some of God's names are absolute, some relative: they indicate either His ineffable glory or His relations to the "economy," either the magnificence of His attributes or the variety of His power.[4] Such names as are applied to God from creatures do not, of course, mean precisely the same in their application to Him:

> Names have one set of meanings among us, Eunomius, and afford another meaning as applied to the transcendent power. For it is true in everything else that the divine nature is cut off from the human by a vast intervening space, and experience here shows us nothing such as it guesses, by suspicions and conjectures, in God. In the same way with regard to the meanings of names, even if hum-

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[1] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 953, J 1. 263,26 - 264,11; cf. Non tres dii, MG 2. 121, J 3/1. 44,2-6.

[2] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 449, J 1. 211,27 - 212,8. --Gregory has, in fact, even added to the store; see Owens, "St. Gregory . . . ," p. 71: "He has many new words compounded with ἀ-negativum to denote the nature of God, such words as ἀνεκφώνητος, ἀπερίγραπτος."

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 957, J 1. 266,27 - 267,9; MG 1104-05, J 395,3 - 396,13.

[4] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 428, J 1. 190,27 - 191,11; 2, MG 944-45, J 256,15-23; 3/1. MG 612, J 2. 48,1-9; 4, MG 524, J 365,7-20. --The same distinction is made with respect to Christ: In Cant. 13, MG 1. 1045-48, J 6. 380,13 - 382,6.

> an things have some name in common with the eternal, what the names mean are separated from one another according to the measure of the distance of the natures.[1]

If we must use names, therefore, to refer to the divine nature, is is better to use those lofty, God-befitting ones that most properly refer to it alone, such as "good," "incorruptible," "just," "wise," than such as can equally well be predicated of creatures, like "generated" and "ungenerated."[2]

Although each of these names we use of God has its own proper meaning, they are not so opposed as to exclude one another, nor do they imply any division of the subject.[3] Thus Lossky exaggerates when he claims that Gregory "passionately defends the thesis of the inaccessibility of God and even goes so far as to refuse practically all real meaning to the different appellations, unwilling to see in them any more than artificial designations."[4] Nevertheless, conformably to the simplicity of God, they are all continuous and so strictly unified with one another that the mention of one implies the meaning of all.[5] In particular, eternity is understood along with any divine name.[6]

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[1] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 441, J 1. 204,29 - 205,10; cf. 3/1, MG 612-13, J 2. 48,24 - 49,12; again, the same doctrine is applied to the Logos in Or. cat. 1, MG 2. 13A.

[2] C. Eun. 3/5, MG 2. 756, J 2. 175,23 - 176,2.

[3] C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 1069, J 1. 365,15-29; cf. De Trin., J 3/1. 14,12-18.

[4] Vladimir Lossky, "La théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite, Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, XXVIII (1939), 205.

[5] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 432, J 1. 196,1-10; cf. Beat. 4, MG 1. 1241BC.

[6] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 428, J 1. 192,5-8; MG 432, J 196,13-14.

Clearly this entire development, while demolishing the facile Eunomian rationalism, has the more positive aim of expressing the struggle involved in using human language for so exalted a subject: all our edifice of names, no matter how scientifically elaborated it be and even despite the fact that it predicates truly, is inadequate, ever incommensurate with what God is. Again, we are always reduced in the last resort to the expedients of analogy and conjecture.[1]

The description of the apophatic nature of Gregory's doctrine of knowing God is now complete. This fundamental "agnosticism" is completely central to his teaching and is powerfully and constantly emphasized throughout his works. But it is not his last word. Also central, also constantly stressed, is another aspect which, for purposes of development, has up to this point been withheld. To this, the ultimate surge of Gregory's speculation on this problem, the next chapter is devoted.

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[1] See the passage quoted above, page 134 (and note 1).

CHAPTER VIII

LIMITS WITHOUT LIMIT

The infinity of God is, for Gregory of Nyssa, the ontological ground of His incomprehensibility and ineffability, as the preceding chapter has shown. But this does not mean, again, that all hope of approaching Him by knowing is lost. De Lubac indicates excellently what this means to Gregory:

> Infinite intelligibility--such is God. The incomprehensible is the opposite of the unintelligible. The deeper we enter into the infinite, the better we understand that we can never hold it in our hands. "Quidquid scientia comprehenditur, scientis comprehensione finitur (Aug. De civ. Dei, XII, xviii)." The infinite is not a sum of finite elements, and what we understand of it is not a fragment torn away from what remains to be understood. The intelligence does not do away with the mystery, not does it even begin to understand it; it in no way diminishes it, it does not "bite" on it: it enters deeper and deeper into it and discovers it more and more as a mystery.[1]

That God is more than we can ever know is not a disappointment, but a promise: a pledge of unanticipated joys to come, and an assurance that the "satiety" on which Origen foundered will never threaten again.

So God's infinity becomes the basis for another, complementary doctrine, which constitutes this Greek Father's most unique contribution to the problem of man's knowledge of God. This is the doctrine which Gregory calls ἐπέκτασις.

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[1]Henri de Lubac, The Discovery of God, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1960), p. 119.

The word itself is adopted from a single verse of St. Paul:

> Brothers, I do not consider that I have captured [perfection] yet; only, forgetting what is behind me and straining forward toward what lies ahead, I am pressing toward the goal for the prize to which God, through Christ Jesus, calls us upward. (Phil. 3:13)

The verb ἐπεκτείνομαι means "I strain (myself) forth toward . . ."; Gregory uses the cognate noun to name the corresponding action or disposition.[1] St. Paul is clearly using the image of the athlete, particularly the runner (which at least partially explains the frequent use of that image in Gregory's discussions of spiritual progress),[2] but the Cappadocian gives his expression a peculiar and precisely defined spiritual sense. Nevertheless, his use of the notion very often involves an explicit reference to the Apostle of the Gentiles.[3]

The doctrine appears, though without that reference, in its essential outlines in the relatively early De anima.[4] The theme is God's intent that the whole of creation be somehow assimilated to the divine nature. Rational natures especially were created as receptacles "so that the divine goods would not lie idle": they are "ves-

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[1] I have not noticed any use of the expression prior to the work against Eunomius. Some of the passages in which it does occur are: C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 457, J 1. 218,13 (here not in the "technical" sense in which Gregory uses it later); ibid. 2, MG 941, J 253,7; Vit. Greg., MG 3. 901C; In sextum Psalmum, MG 1. 608, J 5. 187,8; In Cant. 12, MG 1. 1036, J 6. 366,15; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 404CD, D 2. #238. See also the passages listed in note 3, infra.

[2] For example: Vit. Mos., MG 1. 297B-300A, D 1. #1; MG 300D-301A, D 1. ##5-6; MG 404CD, D 2. #238; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 888, J 6. 159,13-15; 12, MG 1036, J 366,12 - 367,1. For New Testament use, see: I Cor. 9:24; Heb. 12:1.

[3] E.g.: C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 797, J 2. 212,13-14; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 888, J 6. 174,13-16; 8, MG 940, J 245,11-22; 12, MG 1024, J 352,6-10; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 300D, D 1. #5; MG 401A, D 2. #225.

[4] De an., MG 3. 105A-C.

sels endowed with choice." But the unique feature of these vessels is that their capacity increases as more divine gifts are poured into them. For participation of the divine goods increases the receptivity of the participant, causing it to grow and never cease growing. For the fountain of goods flows forth unstintingly, and there is nothing of what it communicates that the soul cannot use to enhance itself: so it becomes better, more capacious, more attractive (in the literal sense: drawing to itself further graces). So each, in a way, contributes to the other: God by His nourishment continually enabling the soul to progress, it by its growth making it possible for Him always to give more. Is is likely, therefore, that there can be no limit to its growth.

This reference to the "growth" of the spiritual soul sounds like a metaphor, and one might reasonably wonder whether Gregory intends this doctrine to be taken literally. But he does so intend and says so constantly, especially in his later writings. The details of this teaching can be at least partially analyzed, and the reasons on which it is founded examined.

One of the essential notions is the dynamic conception of creation indicated in the beginning of the summary of the early statement just given. The totality of creation is growing always more like to God and consequently, so to speak, more fully God's:

> Creation becomes beautiful (ἐν τῷ καλῷ γίνεται) from participation of the greater Good. It not only began to be, but at all moments, through its growth toward the better, it is comprehended as beginning to be beautiful. Therefore it never halts at what has been comprehended: everything created becomes, through participation, a beginning of the ascent toward the greater and,

> according to Paul's expression, never ceases straining forth to what are ahead and consigning what are behind to oblivion.[1]

This dynamic perfectibility is found in a particular way in the created spirit. In attempting to know God, it finds no reasoning in which it can rest: the object of its search ever runs out ahead, yielding no resting-place for the curiosity of thought.[2] Therefore faith takes the place of reasoning, "straining forth toward what are beyond speech and comprehension."[3]

The soul's approach to God is a continual ascent "from power to power" (Ps. 83:6-8),[4] in which the soul is "led by the hand" either by what she has already understood or, like the bride in the Song of Songs, by the divine Word.[5] "For yearning, as a result of what she has already grasped, not to fail of the height that remains above, she makes her movement toward what is above ceaseless, always renewing through what she has already achieved her tension for flight."[6] The great examples of this kind of progress are Abraham and Moses.[7] This

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[1] C. Eun. 3/6, MG 2. 797, J 2. 212,7-14; cf. 1, MG 340, J 1. 112,7-20.

[2] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 365, J 1. 134,22-26.

[3] Vit. Greg., MG 3. 901C; cf. In Cant. 6, MG 1. 893, J 6. 183, 5-10; 8, MG 944, J 250,2-7.

[4] In sextum Psalmum, MG 1. 608, J 5. 187,3; In Cant. 6, MG 1. 889-92, J 6. 179,11-13; 8, MG 941, J 246,13-15.

[5] The reader may have remarked by now that this χειραγωγία is a favorite notion with Gregory; see, for instance, In sextum Psalmum, MG 1. 608, J 5. 187,3-10.

[6] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 401A, D 2. #226; cf. In sextum Psalmum, MG 1. 608, J 5. 187,3-10; In Cant. 5, MG 1. 876, J 6. 158,19 - 159,4; 6, MG 889, J 178,19 - 179,2; 8, MG 940, J 245,20-21; MG 941, J 247,11-18.

[7] Abraham: C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 940, J 1. 252,19 - 253,17; Moses: Vit. Mos., MG 1. 401B, D 2. #227.

upward tendency on the part of the soul is compared to the tendency of heavy bodies to fall unless they are impeded by something else.[1]

As a result of the soul's increasing participation, there is a real growth of itself and of its capacity to receive God and His gifts:

> The soul at every moment becomes larger than herself through her participation of the transcendent and does not cease to grow.[2]

> This is what continually happens to the participant in all the eternity of the ages: increase as a result of ever greater (gifts) happening to those who participate them. . . . in all the eternity of the age without end, he who runs toward You becomes at every moment greater and higher than himself, destined ever to grow correspondingly (ἀναλόγως) through the ascent in good . . . .[3]

This growth is expressed as a continual creation. The created spirit

> . . . looks always toward the first cause of beings, is constantly preserved in good by its participation of the transcendent, and in some way is at every moment being created, transformed toward the greater through its increase in goods . . . .[4]

The activity comes from God, then, giving Himself for participation, supplying the soul not only with new gifts, but with the capacity to receive more: this is the drawing power of the Good and Beautiful.[5] But it must be emphasized that the soul is far from purely passive; it is her own impulse as well as the divine attraction that enables her to ascend. So the Beloved addresses the soul in the Song of Songs:

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[1] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 400D-01A, D 2. ##224-25. Cf. Saint Augustine's "amor meus pondus meum."

[2] In Cant. 5, MG 1. 876, J 6. 158,15-17.

[3] In Cant. 8, MG 1. 941, J 6. 246,3-5, 17-20; cf. C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 340, J 1. 112, 10-14.

[4] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 885, J 6. 174,5-9; cf. C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 340, J 1. 112,7-9.

[5] See, e.g., Vit. Mos., MG 1. 401B, D 2. #225.

> "Hither," He says, "by yourself," not from grief nor from necessity but "by yourself," stirring up her own desire for the Beautiful by her reasonings, not dominated by necessity; for virtue is a lordless thing and voluntary, and free of all necessity.[1]

Paradoxically, however, although the soul makes very real advance in her loving knowledge of God and grows even astonishingly in perfection, she cannot be said to get any "closer" to Him. For He remains transcendent:

> When, therefore, [the divine nature] draws the human soul to participation in Itself, it always surpasses the participant by an equal measure in its preeminence with respect to the superior good . . . the participated good remains equally the same, found always equally in excess of it by the soul which participates always more.[2]

> What is always discovered is much, but what surpasses what has at any moment been comprehended is infinitely times more . . . "You are the same, remaining Highest forever, incapable of ever appearing lower to those who are ascending, since You are at every moment in equal measure higher and loftier than the power of those who are being exalted.[3]

Again, de Lubac succinctly expresses Gregory's attitude:

> Progress in the knowledge of God there is, but it would not merit the name of progress unless it took us nearer the term, and in another sense left us just as far away. As the infinite allows us to approach it, so it proves the more inaccessible. Moreover. "those who ascend never cease ascending"; those who have started on their course move "from beginnings to beginnings through beginnings without end.[4]

Consequently whatever peaks the soul may reach, far from being an end of her ascent, are in fact only the beginning of a new advance:

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[1] *In Cant.* 5, MG 1. 876-77, J 6. 160,14 - 161,1.

[2] *Ibid.*, MG 876, J 158,12-19.

[3] *In Cant.* 8, MG 1. 941, J 6. 246,1-2 (repeated *ibid.* 11, MG 1000, J 321,2-3), 246,20 - 247,1; cf. 6, MG 892, J 181,4-16; *De perf.*, MG 3. 269, J 8/1. 194,11-14.

[4] De Lubac, *Discovery . . .*, p. 159, commenting on *In Cant.* 5, MG 1. 873-76, J 6. 157 - 160.

> What is at any moment comprehended is certainly greater than what has been grasped before but it does not confine the Sought in itself: the bound of what has been discovered becomes, for those who are ascending, a beginning toward the discovery of loftier things. Neither does he who is ascending ever stop exchanging beginning for beginning, nor does the beginning of ever greater goods ever come to an end in itself.[1]

For this she must "forget what is behind"--at least to the extent of not dwelling on it complacently or regarding it as the achievement of her quest.[2] The enjoyment of ever greater goods has the effect of driving from memory their less perfect predecessors. She always hopes for more: "the limit of her previous achievements becomes the beginning of hope for what are still higher."[3] The soul who seeks and does not find, learning that her Beloved is beyond her reach and grasp, begins to despair. But

> . . . the mantle of grief is removed as she learns that to progress continually in seeking and never to cease ascending is the true enjoyment of Him she yearns for, desire as soon as it is fulfilled begetting a new desire of what is beyond.[4]

This is the case of Moses when, dissatisfied with the accumulation of theophanies he has enjoyed, he still asks God for more:

> What he is experiencing seems to me something like this: his soul has assumed a kind of loving disposition toward the Beautiful by nature; hope always drives it from the beauty beheld to what is beyond, ever inflaming desire through what has at any moment been comprehended toward what remains hidden. As a result the ardent lover of beauty, accepting whatever is shown as an image of what

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[1] In Cant. 8, MG 1. 941, J 6. 247,9-14; cf. 5, MG 876, J 159,4 - 160,8; 6, MG 885-88, J 174,11-13; MG 889, J 178,11 - 179,2; MG 892, J 180,4-7; 8, MG 944, J 250,1-5; 11, MG 997, J 320,9-10.

[2] In Cant. 5, MG 1. 876, J 6. 160,12-15; 6, MG 888, J 174,13-20.

[3] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 889, J 6. 178,22 - 179,2; cf. 6, MG 889-92, J 179,11-19; 8, MG 941, J 247,14-18; 11, MG 1000, J 321,16-22; MG 1036, J 366,11-23; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301AB, D 1. #7.

[4] In Cant. 12, MG 1. 1037, J 6. 369,15 - 370,3.

> he yearns for, longs to be filled with the very stamp of the archetype. This is the intent of the daring request which surpasses the bounds of desire, to enjoy Beauty, not through mirrors and reflections, but face to face. And the divine voice grants the request by what it refuses, indicating in a few words an immeasurable depth of understanding.
>
> For the generosity of God agreed to fulfill his desire, but without promising any surcease or satiety of his longing. For it would not be Himself He showed His servant, if what were seen were such as to stop the desire of him who saw. For genuine vision of God consists in this, that he who lifts up his eyes to Him never ceases to desire.[1]

To interpret this attitude as either rash or ungrateful would be to misunderstand it utterly. For it is the due response to a call, which is at once the divine gift and the divine Being. In the Song of Songs, for instance, the Word is constantly exhorting the soul to a nearer approach and a closer union, a greater perfection; Gregory comments:

> What is meant is something like this: "Nobly," He says, "have you followed in the past. You came with me to the mountain of myrrh (for you were buried with me through baptism unto death); you ascended with me, too, to the hill of frankincense (for you rose with me and were exalted in the communion of divinity, which the word 'frankincense' indicates). Ascend to me, too, from these to other mountains, advancing and exalted by active knowledge; hither, then, from Lebanon," He says, "no longer wooed, but bride. For it is not possible to live together with me unless you be transformed through the myrrh of death to the divinity of frankincense. Since, then, you have already reached this height, cease not to ascend, as though you had already reached perfection by these advances. For this frankincense you shared by your resurrection has become your beginning of faith, and the beginning of an advance toward loftier goods. From this beginning, then, which faith is, shall you pass and pass through: that is, you shall come now, and you shall not cease passing through such ascents forever."[2]

Such is the meaning of the Apostle's injunction to "be transformed

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[1] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 401D-404A, D 2. ##231-33; cf. In Cant. 12, MG 1. 1025, J 6. 355,16 - 356,6.

[2] In Cant. 8, MG 1. 944, J 6. 249,11 - 250,7 (cf. from 248,14).

from glory to glory": "at every moment what is being grasped and always discovered is glory, but though it be as great and lofty as possible, it must yet be believed to be less than what is hoped for."[1] The other outstanding example of this disposition, besides Moses, is Abraham.[2]

There is, therefore, no limit to the soul and its growth in perfection. Contemplation reveals no boundary in it, no limit of its growth in the direction of a higher good: no matter though the good present to it at any instant seem as great and perfect as possible, it is only the beginning of one greater and more transcendent.[3] Paul, by his notion of epektasis, has taught us the one limit of the perfection of virtue: not to have a limit.[4] So it may well be that "always to have more of the beautiful is the perfection of human nature."[5]

> And this is really to see God, never to reach satisfaction of the desire. We must rather always look through what we can see, inflamed with the desire to see more. And so no limit can interrupt the growth of the ascent toward God, since no limit can be discovered of the Beautiful, nor can the advance of the desire for it be cut off by any satiety.[6]

The essential reason for this infinity is mentioned--again--in the last sentence. If the doctrine of Gregory is to be intelli-

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[1] In Cant. 5, MG 1. 876, J 6. 160,4-6.

[2] See C. Eun. 2, MG 2. 940-41, J 1. 252,1 - 253,17.

[3] In Cant. 6, MG 1. 885, J 6. 174,9-13.

[4] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 300D, D 1. #5.

[5] Ibid., MG 301C, D 1. #10.

[6] Vit. Mos., MG 1. 404D-405A, D 2. #239; cf. In Cant. 6, MG 1. 892, J 6. 180,1-7; 8, MG 941, J 246,1-5, 16-20, 247,14-18; MG 944, J 250,4-7; 11, MG 997, J 320,8-9; 12, MG 1025, J 356,12-16; MG 1037, J 370,3-7.

gible, it must be stressed again that the ontological foundation of the soul's possibility of eternal progress is, paradoxically enough, the same as that of the incomprehensibility of God: the fact that He is infinite. Time and again he explicitly makes the connection: it is because there is no limit to the perfection of God that the soul can go toward Him, now and forever, without exhausting Him or having to come to a stop.[1] He is infinite because He has no real opposite that could limit the absolute Good.[2]

This granted, the conclusion is inevitable:

> For since the first Good is boundless by nature, the participation of one who enjoys it will also of necessity be infinite, forever comprehending more and every time discovering an excess of what was comprehended. He can never become equal to it, since what he participates is not bounded, nor does he, growing through the participation, stop.[3]

Finally, the doctrine must be given its full effect. There is no reason, from the explanation Gregory gives of it, to limit it to man, nor to this life. He clearly indicates the contrary. Growth is the aspect of infinity with which God has endowed created spirits and is intrinsic to their natures, whether or not they have bodies. And of course it is only consistent to extend the doctrine to the next life. Even after our death God remains infinite and we finite; even then we are still creatures and so "distantial," constituted by "interval"; even the "new heaven and new earth" is still a new creation. These

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[1] In Cant. 5, MG 1. 873, J 6. 157,14-21; 6, MG 885, J 173,11 - 174,5; MG 892, J 179,20 - 180,3; 8, MG 941, J 246,8-12; 11, MG 1000, J 321,16-22; 12, MG 1037, J 370,3-7; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301A, D 1. #7; MG 404B, D 2. #236.

[2] In Cant. 5, MG 1. 873, J 6. 157,21 - 158,12; Vit. Mos., MG 1. 301A, D 1. #7; MG 404BC, D 2. ##236-38.

[3] C. Eun. 1, MG 2. 340, J 1. 112,15-20.

are the implications of the doctrine, and it is necessary only to refer to the repeated "always" and "forever" in the preceding quotations to see that Gregory relentlessly drew them.

What, then, happens to the beatific vision? It remains, although it is considered more dynamically than is usual. This is the fulfillment of what was cited in the beginning of the previous chapter, that all, even created, spiritual beings are in some sense infinite. But since the creature, unlike God, is mutable, its infinity is an absence of limit to its progress when God "leads it by the hand." This essential dynamism of the soul, both here and through all eternity, is the ultimate note of all that Gregory has to say of its progress, through knowledge, toward God. It is a powerful doctrine, full of rich insights, which allows full scope for the mystical tendencies that become more pronounced in the later developments of his speculation.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

This examination of the doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa on human knowledge of God is now complete. Although the quasi-dramatic development adopted here is not to be found as such in his works, it is not unfaithful to him--as a matter of fact, it is suggested by the form of the homily on the sixth Beatitude and that of the entire series of homilies on the Song of Songs. He sees the soul's quest for God as dramatic, although not tragic; and it is a drama full of excitement and adventure, of unexpected novelty. Not for Gregory the dreary, bland satiety that characterizes so many conceptions of the final consummation of union with God: one suspects that it is this promise of pedestrian, tedious sameness implicit in the rationalistic approach of Eunomius to God that provokes him to react so violently against it.

This is, in a true sense, a drama to which its author never writes finis--although in a totally different sense from that which could be said of his master, Origen. For the latter, the unceasing dynamism native to the soul renders its situation forever precarious, since it prevents the soul from ever being "confirmed" in its possession of the Good. Gregory retains the dynamism but sees the relative nature of the peril: the latter can be definitively overcome, while the activity of growth goes on forever.

Since the development of this doctrine has been somewhat involved, it may be of value to review it briefly here. At the same time, with a view to the question whether there is any development discernible in Gregory's thought, attention can be drawn to the works in which various aspects of the doctrine are particularly found.

The first step is simply the awareness of the absolute transcendence of God, of the "ontological gulf" which yawns between Him, as Creator, and the totality of His creation. The basis for this ultimate difference is more explicitly pronounced to be the transcendental attribute of creation, "apartness" or "interval." This is a comprehensive term embracing every aspect of its "createdness": the extension of material things, spatiality and temporality, the progression of creaturely activity. Later consideration makes it clearer that what is thus "apart" in the creature, qua creature, is its limits, of whatever great diversity they may be. Consequently it is perhaps more accurate to say that the radical ground of the difference between God and creatures is the absolute infinity of God. Here it is necessary to stress the "absolute," because Gregory asserts that spiritual creatures have a "kind of infinity"; this does not prevent them from having limits inasmuch as they are creatures, but it does assure them of an openness on the infinite, which is concretely their capacity for endless progress.

The immediate and clearly expressed consequence of this first step is to endanger any possibility at all of knowing God: the creature simply cannot "escape" its own limits noetically any more than ontologically, so that God apparently remains inaccessible.

That there would be something wrong with such a conclusion is indicated by the second step, although the explanation of the reason why it is wrong is not yet given. But it is recalled that God invites man to come to know Him, and that this is in fact the end for which He has made him; for it is by knowledge that man is to be united with and possess God, and it is in this that his ultimate bliss is to consist. Some basis for the possibility of a human approach to God is unveiled by considering the doctrine of the image of God in man. Gregory puts great stress on the importance of this revealed teaching, and indeed is somewhat extreme in his insistence that this means a sharing in every divine characteristic; as image, therefore, to the extent that he does not destroy the resemblance, man is simply glorious. He must, of course, differ from his archetype if he is to be an image and not simply identical with Him. But this difference does not consist in having any less than God, in failing to possess anything that belongs to Him; rather, it is the result of having it in a different way. God has what He has "uncreatedly," by identity and changelessly, whereas man possesses the same by participation, in creaturely fashion and so by essentially changing. But this capacity and need for change implicit in the status of creature, while an imperfection, is still a perfection: change in our nature is good and meant for good.[1]

These considerations prompt an assessment of the means available to man for knowing God and so pursuing his destiny. Scripture proclaims that He can be known through the created effects which, to

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[1] See especially the last page of the De perfectione: MG 3. 285, J 8/1. 213,1 - 214,6.

the discerning ear, declare Him. His activities in the world, particularly those more directly exerted on man's behalf--and here Gregory includes all the benefits of the Heilsökonomie--to the extent that we can apprehend them at all (and he is careful to insist that there are many that escape our very notice), are a way of knowing Him. The creature which most marvellously manifests God, and that most immediate to man, is himself as God's own image: it is by actualizing the image and becoming as like God as possible that man knows Him best. Faith, too, is a way of knowing God, for it makes ours the divine realities that surpass our understanding. Finally, the incarnate Image of God, Christ, makes God known to us in an ultimate manner: in terms of our own reality, the most perfect creature in the most perfect union with God.

What knowledge of God these ways furnish us with is the matter of the next step. We can realize from them that He is Being, by nature and as origin, totally, independently, absolutely; in the same way He is the Good and the Beautiful; He is one transcendently, which we call "simple"; He is infinite and changeless and eternal; He is, again, transcendently wise and powerful.

But beneath all these comforting truths there beats a disturbing note: although we know all this, and more besides, of Him, we are yet completely ignorant of what He is. If God is--or rather since He is--infinite, His ultimate being soars forever and insuperably beyond the reach of our finite minds; and the fifth step once again abruptly makes us aware that He is beyond: beyond the utmost straining of a creature's mind, and a fortiori beyond the most accomplished effort of

any human words. God is incomprehensible, and ineffable.

Without denying the truths thus definitively attained, the final step yet succeeds in transcending them. The effect on us and on our knowing is transformed from check to stimulus, and from despair to utter joy: if God is infinite, there is ever more in Him for the faithful soul to know, and faithfully He will enable it to know ever more, forever. That He is incomprehensible means, not that He can never be understood, but that He can be understood ever more perfectly. So Gregory's final answer to the problem is epektasis, that intent, attentive tension of the soul in full vigor, the beloved dove homing forever on the divine Beauty.

Not surprisingly, the work against Eunomius supplies most of the documentation for the distance between man, as creature, and God, since its main purpose is to demolish an attempt to make God ridiculously accessible. The stress on God's infinity is divided fairly equally between this and the commentary on the Song of Songs, with its corollary of His transcendence of any created intellect. The primary sources for the doctrine of man as the image of God are such works as the De anima et resurrectione and the De hominis opificio, although it is interesting to note how much of this and the rest of the doctrine is to be found in the small section of the treatise on virginity (the tenth through thirteenth chapters) that is relevant to the problem. The homily on the sixth Beatitude provides the most extensive and detailed account of how God can be known through the image; fine rhetorical use is made of the opposition between God's incomprehensibility and the promise that the pure of heart shall see Him.

Even though Gregory threw himself wholeheartedly into the polemic against Eunomius--all the more since it involved vindication of his beloved Basil from a scurrilous and posthumous attack--and although it is much the longest of his writings, this is not the work to which he commits his distinctive self. It is rather in those writings concerned with spiritual perfection and the ascetic life (again, it cannot be forgotten, the fostering and furthering of Basil's work), the ones left to us from his later, retired, and probably even disappointed years, that he most vigorously and perfectly expresses the final achievement of his thought: that doctrine not for the very young nor for the old in spirit, only for those in the full strength and power of their manhood. The treatise on perfection has its place here, the commentary on Ecclesiastes, eminently the life of Moses; but above all towers, for its lyric beauty and its speculative suggestiveness, the commentary on the Song of Songs. Here it is that he is most consummately himself, and here he can powerfully emphasize God's transcendence and infinity as a spur, not a deterrent, to the seeking soul; for here transcendence and infinity are the ground for eternal growth, eternal advance, and everlasting, joyful penetration.

"From beginning to beginning"--"from power to power"--"from glory to glory." These, and all the others like them, are the phrases by which one most immediately remembers Gregory of Nyssa, phrases that open startling, endless vistas on the eternal newness of the divine Gift, unbounded distances for the soul to traverse in joy unceasing as she approaches the infinite God. Not too often, in the

history of Christian thought's attempt to appropriate the treasure of truth entrusted to it, does there arise so creative and powerful a surge of thought. It deserves not to be forgotten.

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Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine on Knowledge of God

Dissertation directed by W. Norris Clarke, S.J., Ph. D.

The problem, whether and how man can know God, has a very long history; it is of universal and yet existential concern. The contribution to its solution studied here is that of one of the most influential Fathers of the Eastern Church, perhaps the most powerful Christian philosopher prior to Augustine, and considered the initiator of mystical theology. This problem is central to all his personal, pastoral, and speculative concerns.

Gregory, who wrote mainly between 379 and 393 A.D., is solidly in the Christian-Platonist tradition; he was strongly influenced by Plato and Plotinus, but also by Origen and by his own brother, Basil "the Great." Although his works belong to many categories, there are two main types: polemical writings against the extreme Arians, particularly Eunomius, who denied the divinity of the Word by proposing "Unbegotten" as the essential definition of God; and many works, some more speculative and others rather practical, devoted to explaining for the monks living under his brother's rule, or for his congregations, the Christian pursuit of perfection in God.

The author follows relevant themes through Gregory's texts, drawing together the elements of a doctrine which is never thematic-

ally developed. The fundamental aspect of this Father's solution to the problem is his stress on the infinity of God. Due to this He is, first of all, immeasurably far from the kind of being that creatures have; therefore He also exceeds their knowledge: a finite mind can grasp only a finite object. God is transcendent, then, and consequently incomprehensible and ineffable; Gregory, throughout his writings, stresses this constantly and energetically.

Yet he is thoroughly conscious of the importance of knowing God for Christian life, both in this world and the next: so particular attention is directed to his doctrine of the image of God in man through which some approach to God is possible. His discussion of the ways in which God can be known--in which the part of reason and that of faith are never clearly distinguished--is analyzed, and a chapter is devoted to the divine "characteristics" which use of these ways of knowing reveals.

Finally, his most characteristic doctrine is explained, what he calls epektasis: unending progress in knowing God. Again, its ground is the divine infinity. Since this prevents the soul from ever comprehending what God is, He in His goodness continually fills its capacity, then increases the latter that He may communicate even more perfect knowledge; the soul, for its part, is full of joy in what it knows of Him but always desires more, since it never grasps Him fully. Thus Gregory's final solution to the problem is dynamic: ceaseless penetration by the loving soul of the unfathomable depths of God.

VITA

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